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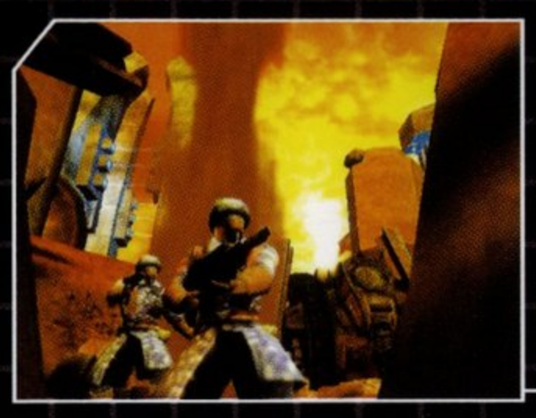

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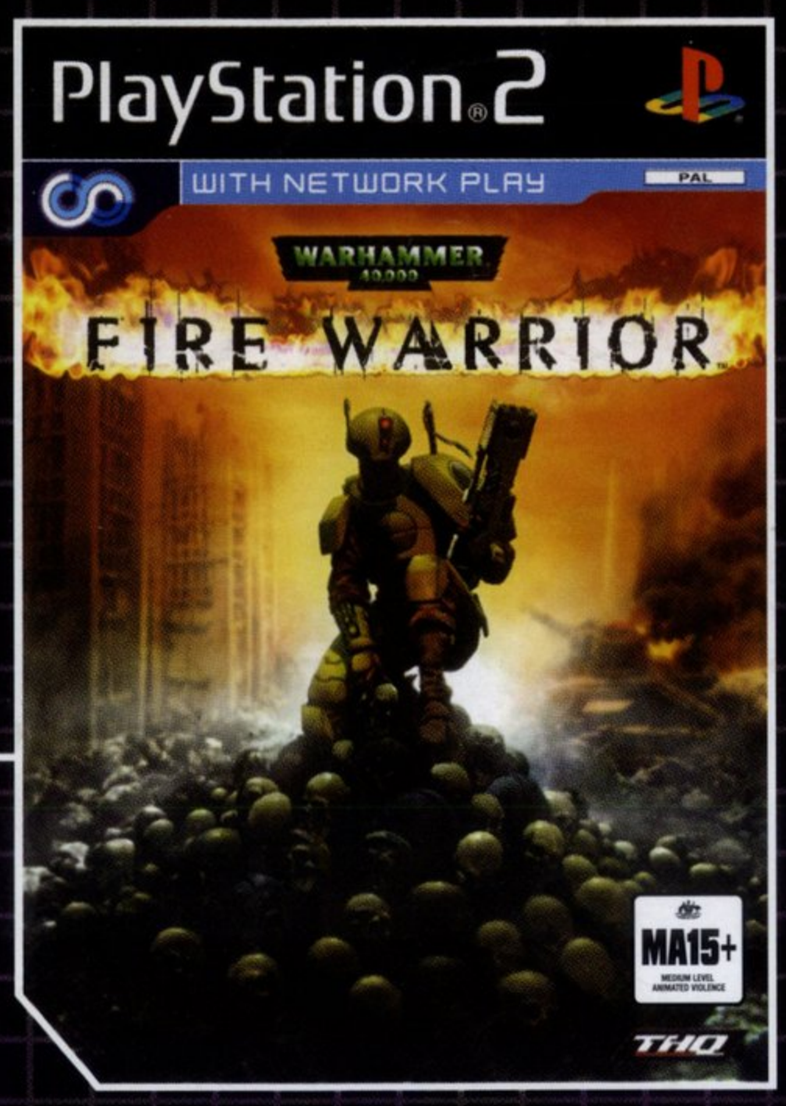

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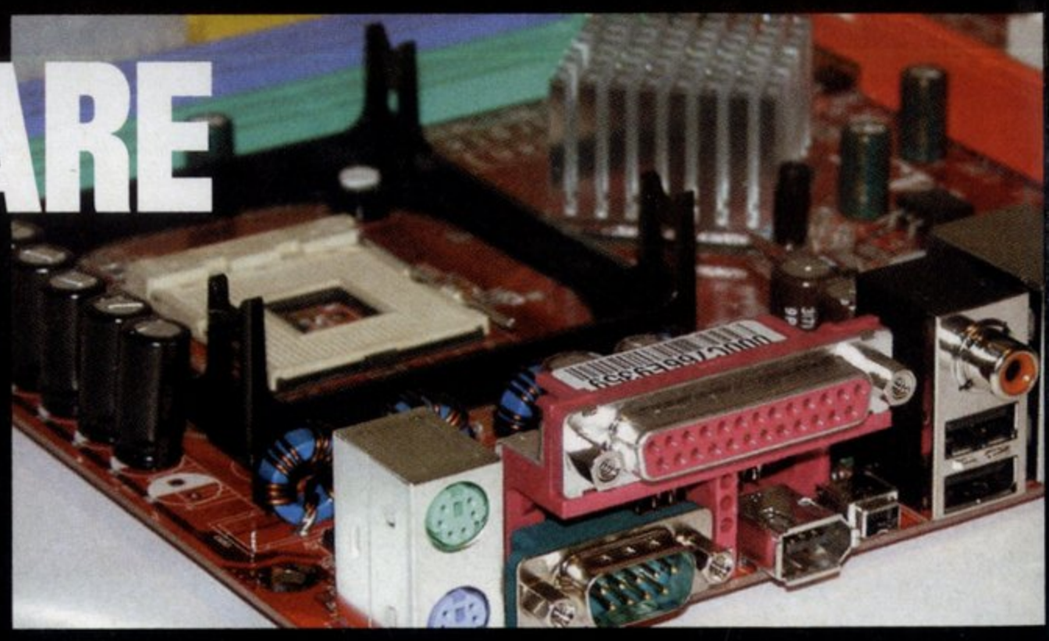

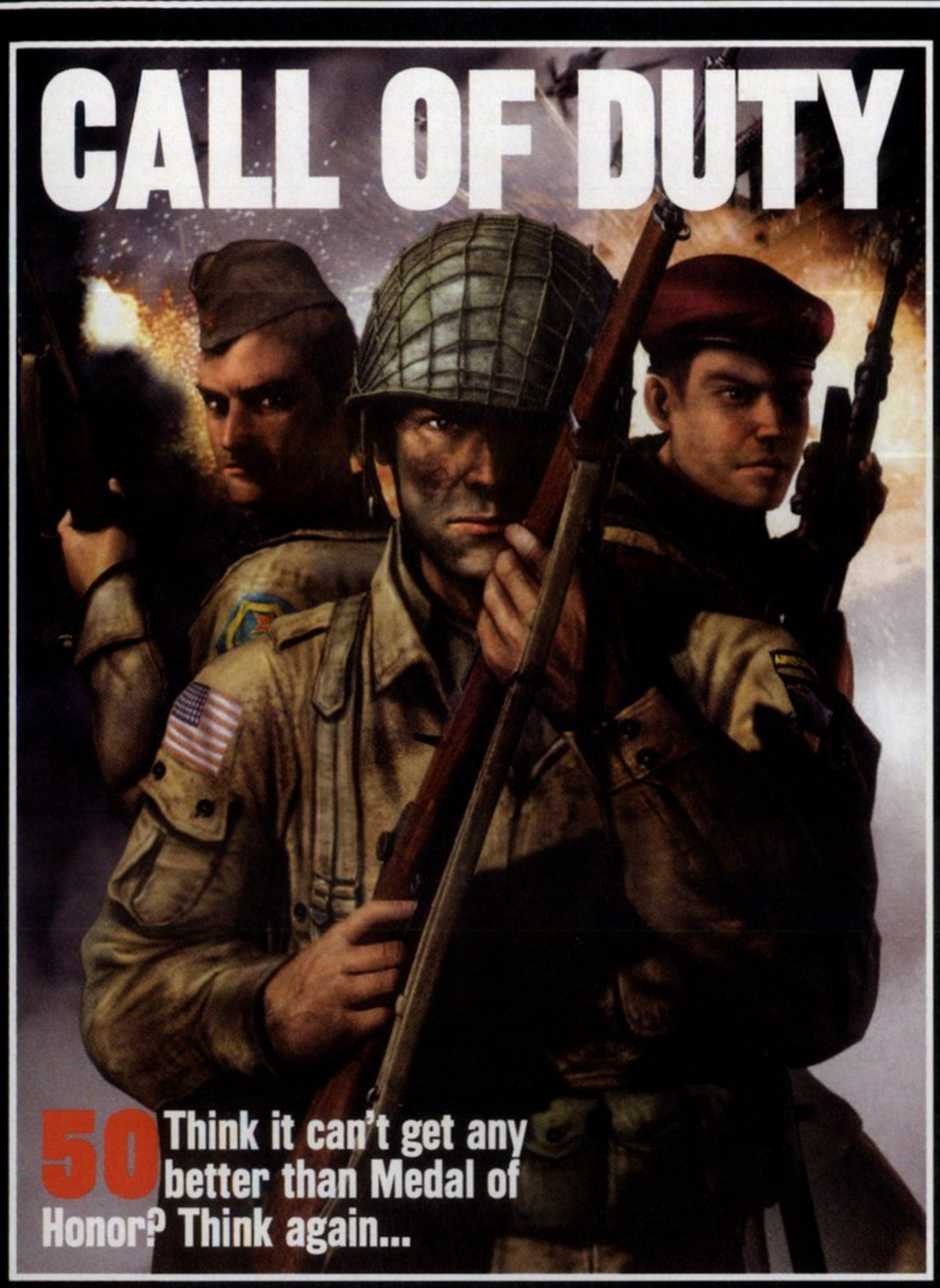

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www.derwenthoward.com.au

WELCOME TO AUSTRALIA'S BEST PC GAMES MAGAZINE

Star Wars bores

We like *Star Wars* here at PC Games Addict. A lot, in fact. It was a very important part of growing up for us – as kids we watched the movies, played with the toys and hit our friends with sticks while making "bwaow-bwoom-bwwww" lightsaber noises. Then, as we got a little bit older and PC technology began to catch up with our imaginations, we got to relive our favourite movie moments in classic games like *X-Wing*, *TIE Fighter* and *Jedi Knight*.

But pretty soon things started going slightly wrong. George Lucas decided to fiddle with our beloved movies, adding alien song-and-dance routines and other pointless nonsense then calling them "special" editions. LucasArts sped their output of *Star Wars* games, turning the once priceless license into little more than a logo that was put on rubbish games in order to sell a few extra copies to unsuspecting punters.

Then, following a desperate 20-year wait, came the new movie: *The Phantom Menace*... complete with Jar-Jar Binks (enough said there). And that was followed by a whole load more bad *Star Wars* games.

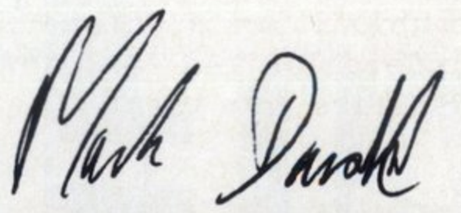
Even through all of this abuse, however, we've stayed *Star Wars* fans. We still scour the Internet for rumours about *Episode III*, we still get excited about the idea of owning the original trilogy on DVD, and we still hit friends with sticks while making lightsaber noises whenever we get the chance.

And thank the maker, we've finally been rewarded for our unfaltering loyalty with the first truly great *Star Wars* PC game in too many years – *Knights of the Old Republic*. Read our massive exclusive review starting on page 38 to find out just how right developers Bioware have got things.

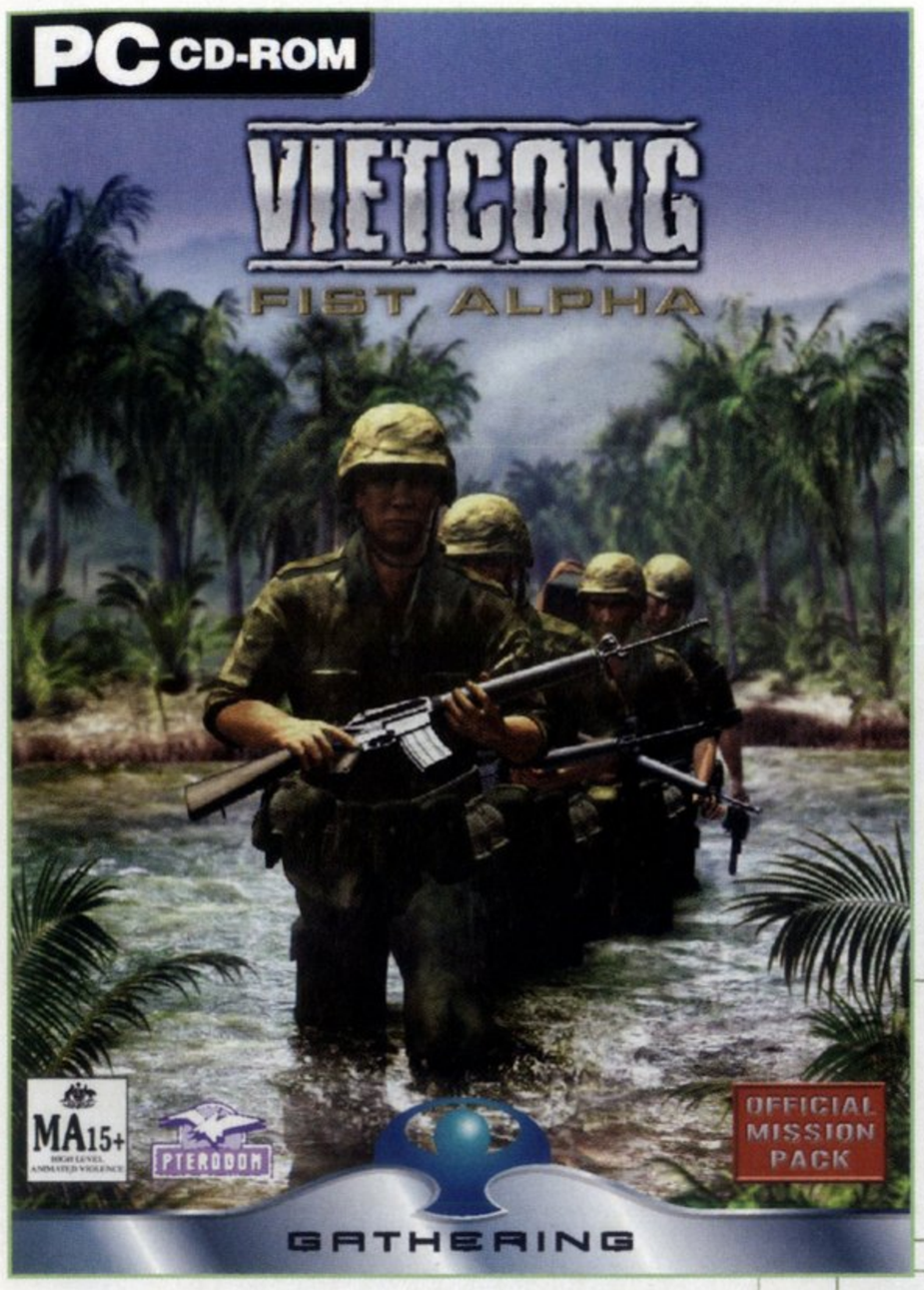
Amazingly, in the very same month, the *Star Wars* game we've all been dreaming of since long before the technology to make it even existed has finally turned up – *Star Wars Galaxies*. The MMORPG that allows you to create your own character and live in a galaxy far, far away with thousands of other people certainly has ambition, but does it live up to its potential? Read the review beginning on page 44 for the full lowdown.

While we've been going all Jedi crazy this month, a number of huge non-*Star Wars* PC games have also made their way into the office in time for the Christmas period. Our seemingly never-ending reviews section this issue contains such anticipated gems as *Call Of Duty*, *Hidden & Dangerous 2*, *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* and *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, as well as a bulging sackful of other treats for you to enjoy over the silly season.

So have yourselves a very merry Christmas, a blinding New Year, and may the Force be with you!



MARK DONALD
EDITOR

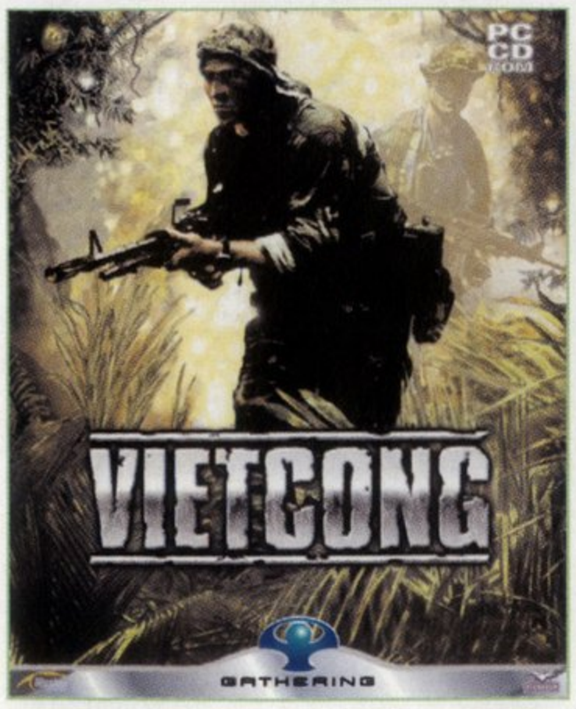


Break out the bug juice, lock and load...

Viet Cong: Fist Alpha
Official Mission Pack!

Placing you in the highlands of Vietnam, Vietcong Fist Alpha brings 7 brand new single player missions as well as 8 new multi-player maps to expand that jungle experience of Vietnam in 1967.

With 6 new weapons as well as bayonets for weapons and machetes along with even more artillery raining shells down on both US and NVA alike, Vietcong Fist Alpha also brings the ubiquitous B52 Bomber and F-105 Thunderchief and F4 Phantom fighters into play.



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SCOOP! YOUR FIRST LOOK AT...

THE LORD OF THE RINGS THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

Promises warfare hairier than hobbit feet.

By TIM STONE

DEVELOPER PROFILE

EALA

Country USA
Established 2003
www.eagames.com

The 'super studio' created when Westwood, EA Pacific and the original EALA (a developer that itself started life as Dreamworks Interactive) blundered into the same booth of a prototype teleportation device, is the inheritor of two massively successful games series – *Medal of Honour* and *C&C* – and around 300 staff. Presently they have plans to expand, moving from their current West LA premises to larger offices in a new seaside community controversially built over one of California's last remaining wetlands.

Previous Games:
Command & Conquer: Generals

IF it was creative timetabling on EA's part then they made no mention of it. We would much prefer to think it was simply a poetic accident that saw us spending September 22nd – Bilbo's and Frodo's birthday – ensconced in EA's Californian HQ getting acquainted with an RTS that will end a Lord of the Rings strategy drought that commenced when the world was young and the woods were wide and wild (circa 1990).

Actually – thinking about it – it won't be *Battle for Middle-Earth* that ends the barren years because Vivendi will be Pippin it to the post with a Tolkien-inspired epic of their own, *LotR: War of the Ring*, due any day now. Somewhat ironically it's this early bird and holder of the literary licence that looks likely to wander furthest from the text and draw the most benefits from publicity surrounding the release of the next film. On the evidence of our recent visit, *BfME*, the holder of the movie licence, while missing the cinematic boat by many months, will display the more profound engagement with and respect for the source material.

Any worries about licence-induced laziness and the unsuitability of the *C&C: Generals* engine for fantasy combat dissipated like tobacco-smoke galleons as we watched dramatic demonstration battles unfold and quizzed our hosts.

Battle lines blend convincingly.

"ENTS TEARING CHUNKS OF STONE FROM RAMPARTS THEN HURLING THEM AT FOES, SIEGE TOWERS DISINTEGRATING..."

Pleasingly, the differences between the four playable civilisations go a lot deeper than the physiognomies of their troops. Mordor relies on weight of numbers but must seize scattered camps *AoM*-style if its armies are to enlarge. The furnaces of Isengard have an insatiable appetite for timber while the fortunes of Gondor are decided in the fields. Perhaps the most interesting way of life belongs to the horsemen of Rohan whose lifeblood is the refugees that constantly seek the safety of its settlements.

Trolls can rip up trees to make clubs.

Release Winter 2004

Sword-wielding serfs and swift cavalry are entirely appropriate elements of Rohan ranks but don't – at this stage – look all that tempting from a play point-of-view when compared with the marvellous monstrosities that serve Mordor and Isengard. Who is going to want to command human armies composed largely of the usual medieval suspects plus the odd uppity ash tree when the forces of darkness boast awesome tusked mumakils, swooping nazgul, and club-happy trolls? Well, some motivation should be provided by the Fellowship themselves, who will appear in-game as controllable *Warcraft III*-style heroes complete with skills, inventories, and experience levels.

In many of the engagements we witnessed, siege warfare was central and divertingly savage. Ents tearing chunks of stone from ramparts then hurling them at foes, siege towers disintegrating under bombardments from wall-mounted catapults, defending archers scattering as nazgul swept their lines... Far from man-made refuges, control of Nature's own fortifications will be crucial – hills providing combat bonuses, forests opportunities for concealment, and rivers and pools steady hit-point replenishment.

Little was said about campaigns except that there would be a 'good' sequence that follows the footprints of the fiction as diligently as any ranger, and ample opportunities for the blackhearted to trash Middle-Earth. *LotR:BfME*'s own Mount Doom is some way off but – have no fear – the fiery, lidless eye atop PCGA Towers will be tracking it all the way.

COMING SOON!

Expect an epic account of the full game, complete with appendices, maps, chronologies and a full Elvish-English dictionary. In three volumes.

- **Genre** Real-time strategy
- **Developer** EA LA
- **Publisher** Electronic Arts

BFME WILL PUT THE ENT IN ENTERTAINMENT BECAUSE...

- It recreates the best martial moments from the movies.
- It's deep, Helm's Deep.
- It doesn't take too many liberties with the sacred text.
- The *C&C* craftsmen are behind it.

It seems units caps won't go higher than 500.

UPCLOSE JOIN ON FOR WAR

"Battles that talk to each other"is Design Director Dustin Browder's summation of an intriguing 'epic war' multi-player mode that may grace *LotRBfME*. The plan is for team games to be divided up into a key central battle (like the fight for Minas Tirith) designed to last around 40 minutes and a string of secondary battles probably running for about half that time. When players conclude their satellite skirmishes they join the hub hullabaloo, bringing any surviving troops along with them.

You'll need balls, a bow-saw and a big stepladder to poach mumakil ivory.

SCOOP! YOUR FIRST LOOK AT...

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

Decent likenesses belie brilliant gameplay.

The king of soccer looks forward to kicking off on PC.

By LEE HALL

DEVELOPER PROFILE

KCET

Country Japan
Established 1999
www.konamityo.com

KCE Tokyo have long been rivals of fellow Japanese development house KCE Osaka. The Osaka lot make *ISS 3*, the international-oriented arcade take on footie, whereas the Tokyo guys are dedicated to a more realistic, challenging and long-lasting version of the beautiful game. And believe us, there's no love lost between these 'friendly' rivals.

WHO needs a console? *Halo* is here, *Vice City* blasted onto our monitors months ago and now *Pro Evolution Soccer 3*, considered by footie-loving gamers to be the best sports title on any format, is set to wow us with its dazzling action and unsurpassed atmosphere.

Acclaim for a title so steeped in the joy and agony of real soccer has been deservedly gushing. It was recently awarded a glowing 9 out of 10 in *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine-Australia*, and evidence suggests the PC version could be even better than its console counterpart. And we should know, we've played it. For a start, the game runs faster, loads faster and looks far better than the PS2 version. Apart from the general hike in the level of details, facial animations are more expressive and player likenesses are more accurate.

"FOR A START, THE GAME RUNS FASTER, LOADS FASTER AND LOOKS FAR BETTER THAN THE PS2 VERSION."

What's more, you can even indulge in a spot of LAN play with up to eight players slogging out any single match. And it's for this co-operative play that *PES* has become so famous, moving grown men to embrace publicly after pulling off a beautifully crafted move.

Underneath all this, the core experience for PC gamers remains gloriously identical to the PS2 original. The game boasts an at times peculiarly underground feel, in stark contrast to the gloss of games such as *FIFA Soccer 2004*. Commentary is passable, the complement of licences is incomplete (ever drilled a free-kick under the wall with Frank De Mole at Trad Brick stadium? You will soon), and even the odd frustrating glitch crops up during play. Overall, however, *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* plays like a dream.

It's not even the scoring of goals that will cause you the most joy. Pulling off an audacious chipped through-ball, or rounding your man with a well-judged jink will be your mead as you gorge yourself on your own intoxicating football. Playing against mates is predictably satisfying as you humble them with possession play, incisive passing and ruthless counter-attacks. You'll hit the bar, clear it off your own line, drill it into the top corner and score an own goal courtesy of a diving header in the first half of your average game. But only after you've evolved your skills and learned to utilise the clearly defined abilities of each player

You'll feel like a soccer artist, building moves to rival the sweeping attack that lead to Carlos Alberto's stunner for Brazil in 1970. Your palette is a vast array of realistically-statted players, your canvas the sometimes rain-soacked, sometimes heat-baked pitches of world soccer. Even the single-player mode is brilliant, operated through a crassly constructed, but wonderfully addictive 'Master League' system. Your mission is to take a side full of no-hopers through the ranks, gaining credits to splash on new players as you enjoy success on the field. Gamers of a certain age will be fondly reminded of *Speedball 2*, younger players will be no less hooked.

In fact, this game is like your perfect laydee. Addictive, fun, clever and (*Let's just leave it there shall we, Lee?* – Ed)

Despite *PES*'s heart-stopping goalmouth scrambles the crowd seem a bit flat.

Release December 2003

COMING SOON!

We'll curl a blinding full review into next month's mag. Just as soon as we can think of some original soccer metaphors.

- **Genre** Sports
- **Developer** KCE Tokyo
- **Publisher** Konami

PES3 WILL SEND *FIFA* HOME IN AN AMBULANCE BECAUSE...

- It will turn PC soccer into an art-form.
- The graphics and loading times trump those on PS2.
- It boasts the most addictive single-player football action ever.
- It rewards inventive, ambitious play, not exploiting glitches.

Unlike *FIFA*, sustaining pressure and going for a shut-out is a viable tactic.

Even against a seven man Spanish defence, slick passing will cut a swathe to goal.

UPCLOSE TAKING CONTROL

These days PC controllers aren't half bad at all, but if you fancy emulating the pure experience of *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* as the developers intended there's a cost effective way to do so. Have a look around your local shops or the internet and buy a PS2 to USB controller adaptor for a relatively low price. Official PS2 pads can be picked up fairly cheaply nowadays, too. Now your PS2-owning mates have got no excuse when you whip them on their beloved game with their own tools of the trade.

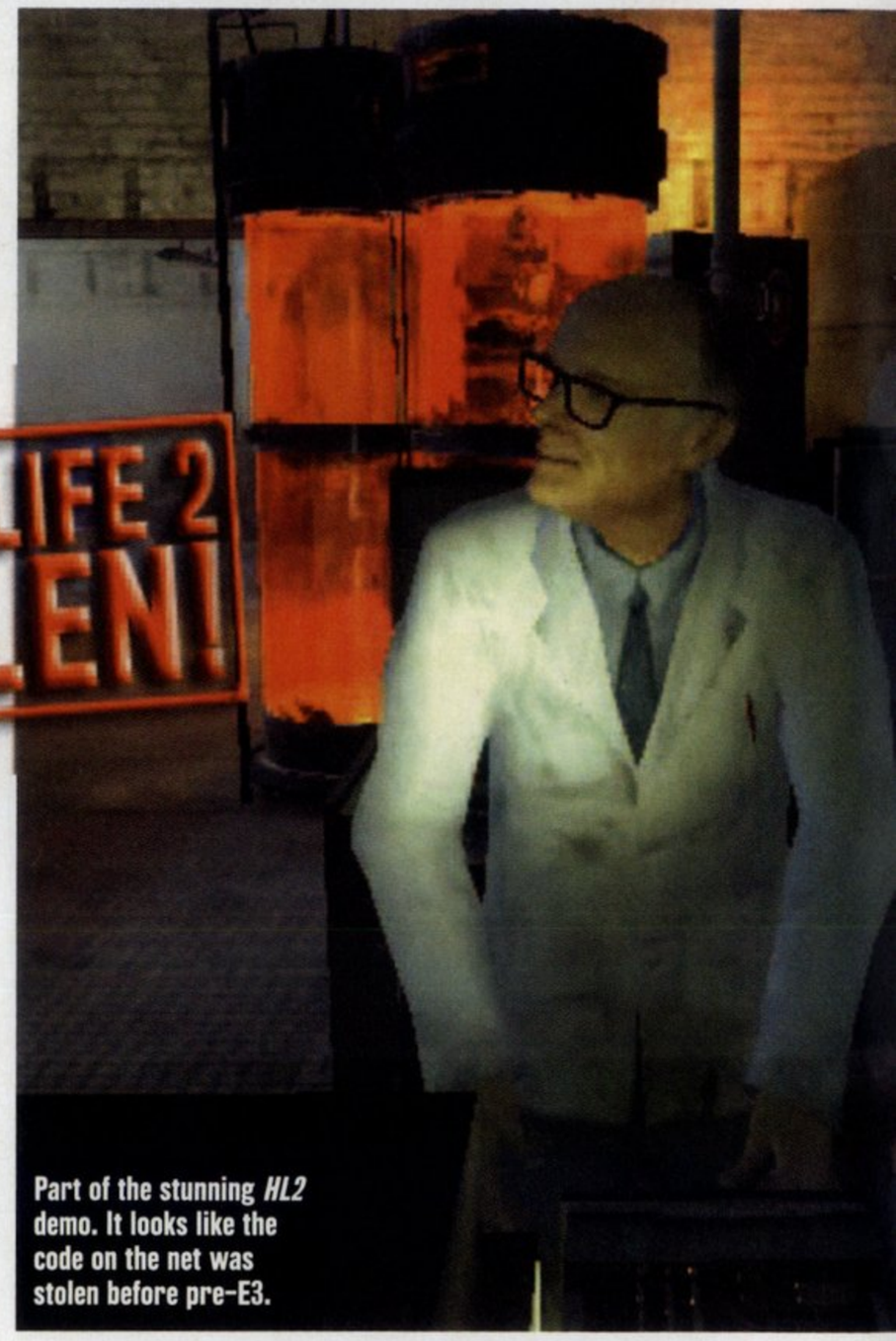
EYEWIT

THE PC GAMING UNIVERSE IN 13 PACKED PAGES!

SPECIAL NEWS REPORT

HALF-LIFE 2 HITS THE NET!

Hackers steal Half-Life 2 code from Valve. Playable code leaked online.



Part of the stunning *HL2* demo. It looks like the code on the net was stolen before pre-E3.

Valve Software have suffered the biggest theft in PC gaming history. Part of the source code and playable content of *Half-Life 2*, the most eagerly anticipated PC game of the year, has been stolen by hackers and distributed freely on the net.

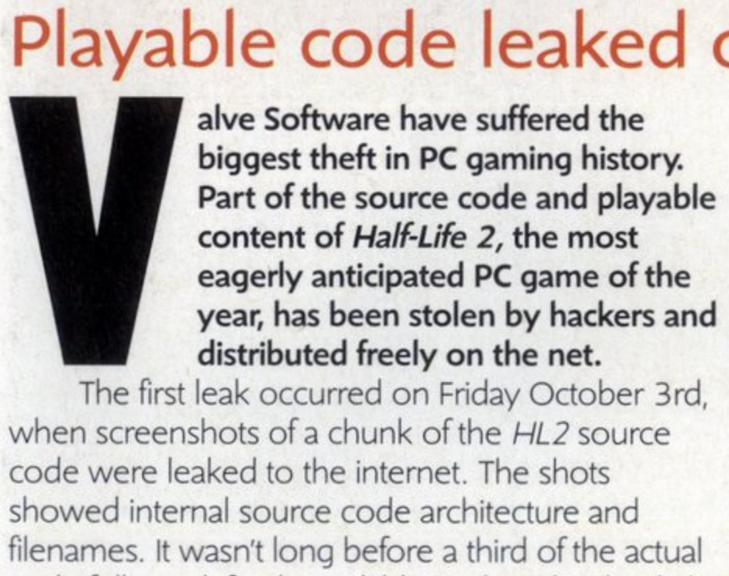
The first leak occurred on Friday October 3rd, when screenshots of a chunk of the *HL2* source code were leaked to the internet. The shots showed internal source code architecture and filenames. It wasn't long before a third of the actual code followed, freely available to download as links were exchanged on key internet forums. The revolutionary *HL2* engine and many of Valve's programming secrets were now laid bare.

The day after the leak, Valve released a statement revealing the extent of the loss. Posting to several fan sites, Gabe Newell confirmed that the the code was taken directly from Valve's servers. The hackers remotely accessed Valve's machines after apparently e-mailing the company a Trojan device that exploited a security flaw in Microsoft's Outlook. The hackers seemingly spent a week leeching as much material as possible before releasing chunks to the public. The distraught developer made a plea to the wider online community for help in tracking down the attackers.

Following the leak, publisher Vivendi announced that security issues surrounding the

"On Tuesday October 8th, a playable version of *HL2* leaked."

compromised game would force a rewrite of the code and delay *Half-Life 2* until 2004. Valve refused to confirm any delay, but Newell released a follow-up statement claiming that their main priority was finishing the game but that they were also closing in on the perpetrators of the attack (many online sources claimed they knew the hackers' identity as the rumour mill cranked up to full speed).



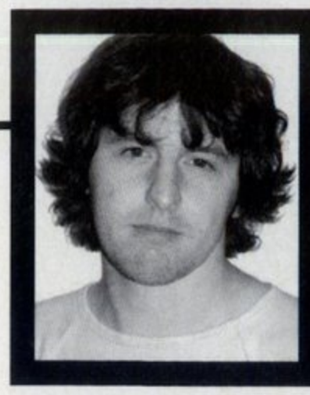
Vale's security measures expose more hackers.

The good news, at the time, was that it appeared the source code could not be fully exploited as game elements like textures, weapon models and sound effects had not been taken. But on Tuesday October 8th, a playable version of *HL2* emerged on the net. Since then, screenshots, technical details, and even patches have been steadily released online. The playable excerpt is not the full game. But many of the closely guarded gameplay elements can be seen in raw form. Perhaps more significantly the game is being altered. Third parties have already manipulated the content, discussed the storylines, revealed some of the characters and played with the new weapons. An additional 'patch' was released on October 9th that included *Counter-Strike* and the original *Half-Life* as rendered by the *Half-Life 2* engine.

The high profile of Valve has made them a prestige target for hackers. Cheat clans have been fighting a war against the company and *Counter-Strike* for years. But the scale of this theft is unprecedented given the status of *Half-Life 2* and the imminence of its release. The repercussions of this act are huge for Valve and for PC gamers.

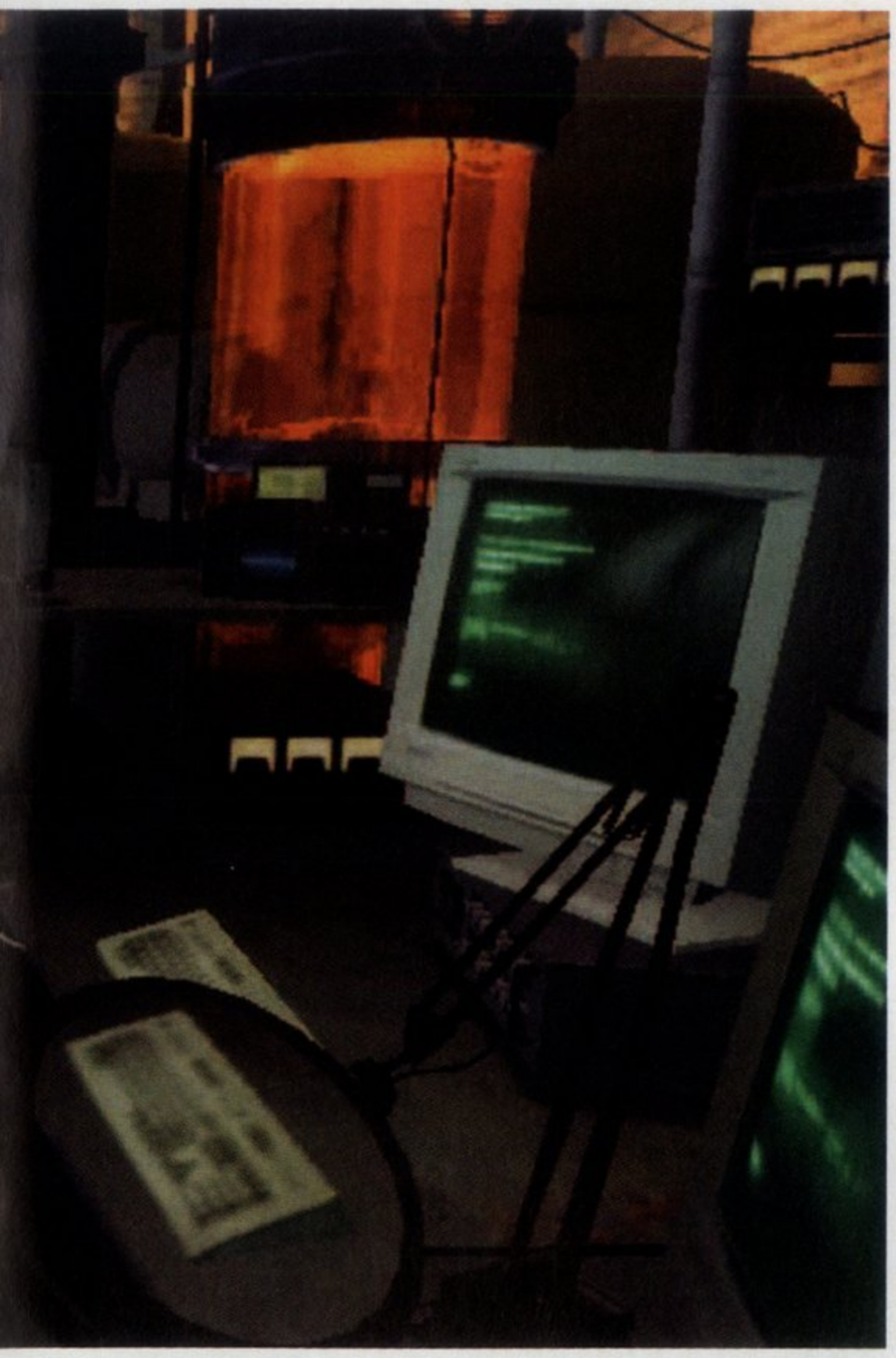
A source code leak is a terrible loss for a developer. It means the engine, the incredible

TNE.SS



Can you believe it? After spending so long keeping their work secret, Valve suffer a public humiliation. The most eagerly awaited game of our time is online, stolen directly from their servers. Can the developer recover from the theft of their most valuable property? For the sake of gamers, we hope so. Email your opinions: **pcga@derwenthoward.com.au**.

CRAIG PEARSON, STAFF WRITER



AI, the graphics and animation routines have all been exposed for anyone to see, reverse engineer and copy. Source code is the stuff that makes the game live and it's taken some of the industry's best programmers five years of painstaking work to create. Valve's survival as a company and producer of great games relies on their being able to capitalise on their own creativity without it being stolen, ripped off and exploited by rivals and hackers. This is a cruel blow Valve didn't deserve.

Further Information

www.valve.com
■ Valve's homepage. They're not saying much right now.

THE PLAYERS

ANONYMOUS HACKERS

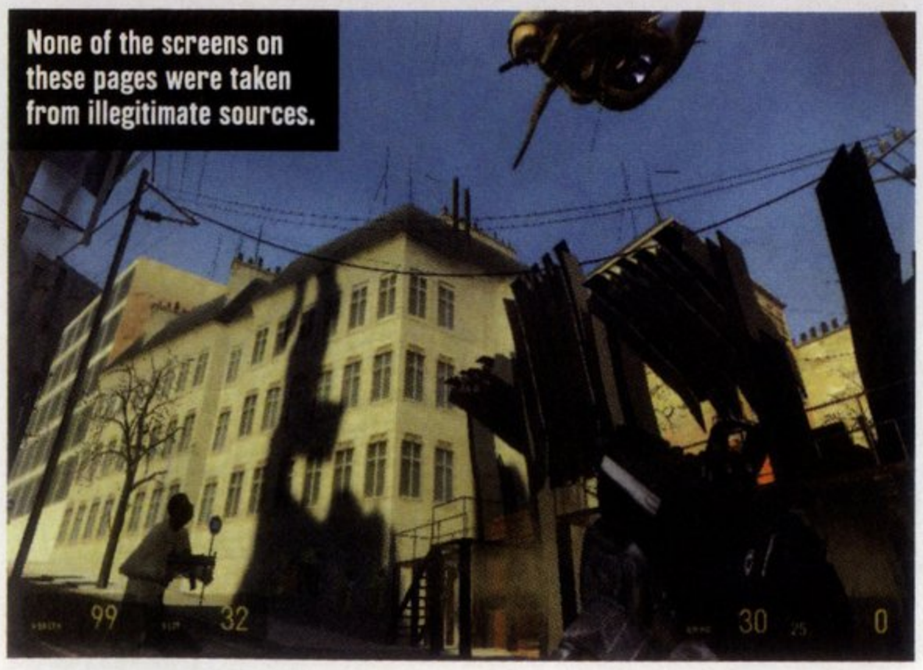
The group that infiltrated Valve still remain unknown to the general public. There is not yet any direct evidence to link the group that stole the source code with the party that leaked the playable content. Nevertheless, Valve have been threatened by anonymous online postings that claim to possess and be willing to release more material to the public.

THE COMMUNITY

The response from online fans has ranged from utter shock, and sympathy for Valve to outright contempt for the developers. Most of the forums were on Valve's side, until claims began to circulate that the playable code was the sum of the company's progress. Rumours spread that the E3 demos were faked, and some credulous, easily exciteable types chose to believe them. Clearly the leaked code is unfinished, not representative of the final game nor fit for public consumption. But, at a time of high drama, some people would rather believe the sensational than the truth.

VALVE

Valve have been frank with the community from the start, but the shock of continual leaks has forced them to withdraw from the public eye to assess the damage. The consequences of the theft are potentially far-reaching. In addition to their own loss, some analysts believe that Valve could be sued by their development partners. The *Half-Life 2* source code also contains work belonging to other developers that Valve have licensed for use in their game. One example, is the Havok physics engine. Valve are contractually bound to protect this code so, if it is leaked to the net, they could be held liable. That could have grave implications for the stability of the developer and knock-on effects for all gamers.



None of the screens on these pages were taken from illegitimate sources.

MORE HALF-LIFE 2 OVER THE PAGE...

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GOBBETS

ER, WHAT?

There's a game based on ER the TV series in the works with Warner Brothers looking to capitalise on the 11th season of the NBC show. The game will feature the likenesses and voices of key cast members, as you take control of a young intern. Clearly a gaming concept that's destined for greatness.

PHWOARST-PERSON SHOOTER

Fighting the myth that gamers are all uglier than a motorway, www.sexiestgamer.com is searching for the most attractive joystick mangler. The international compo is open to he and she gamers and works on the infallible 'hot-or-not' principle. The public can vote online and winners will be flown off to Hollywood to parade their gorgeous mugs amid the rich and famous. The PC Games Addict team have all modestly declined to enter but are manfully prepared to offer their reviewing services. Craig awards this entrant a staggering 93%.

EMULATION STATION:

Emulation has long been a legal quagmire for gamers but a US company has found a way around the law-busting unpleasantries. Star Roms, inc. are offering classic Atari games like *Centipede* and *Missile Command* for as little as $USD2. Download the tiny programs then play them on massively powerful computers without worrying about the CIA kicking in the door. More at: www.starroms.com.

SPECIAL NEWS REPORT

THE LEAK

Swiped code is playable. But what state is it in?

Just before the Strider breaks into Kliener's Lab.

Beware, hackers: the ant-lions have your scent.

HALF-LIFE 2 STOLEN!

What does all this mean? With so much *Half-Life 2* content now residing on so many hard drives, the web's crawling with hearsay. We've sifted the ramblings and come up with some actual facts.

The real disaster is the leak of the *HL2* engine, confusingly known as Source. One of the major implications for Valve is that they intended to license this technology to other developers. Income from licensing deals is one of the ways that Valve would ensure their financial independence in the future. This is important to gamers because many games are compromised when the money men interfere with the development process. We want to see strong developers who can resist being held to financial ransom, so any act that interferes with that is bad news for gamers. But with hackers having access to the internal workings of the code, there's a real possibility that it may be too compromised to be sold in it's current state. If there's any major re-writing to be done, it will mean more delay for Valve.

The game content that leaked appears to be an unfinished build.

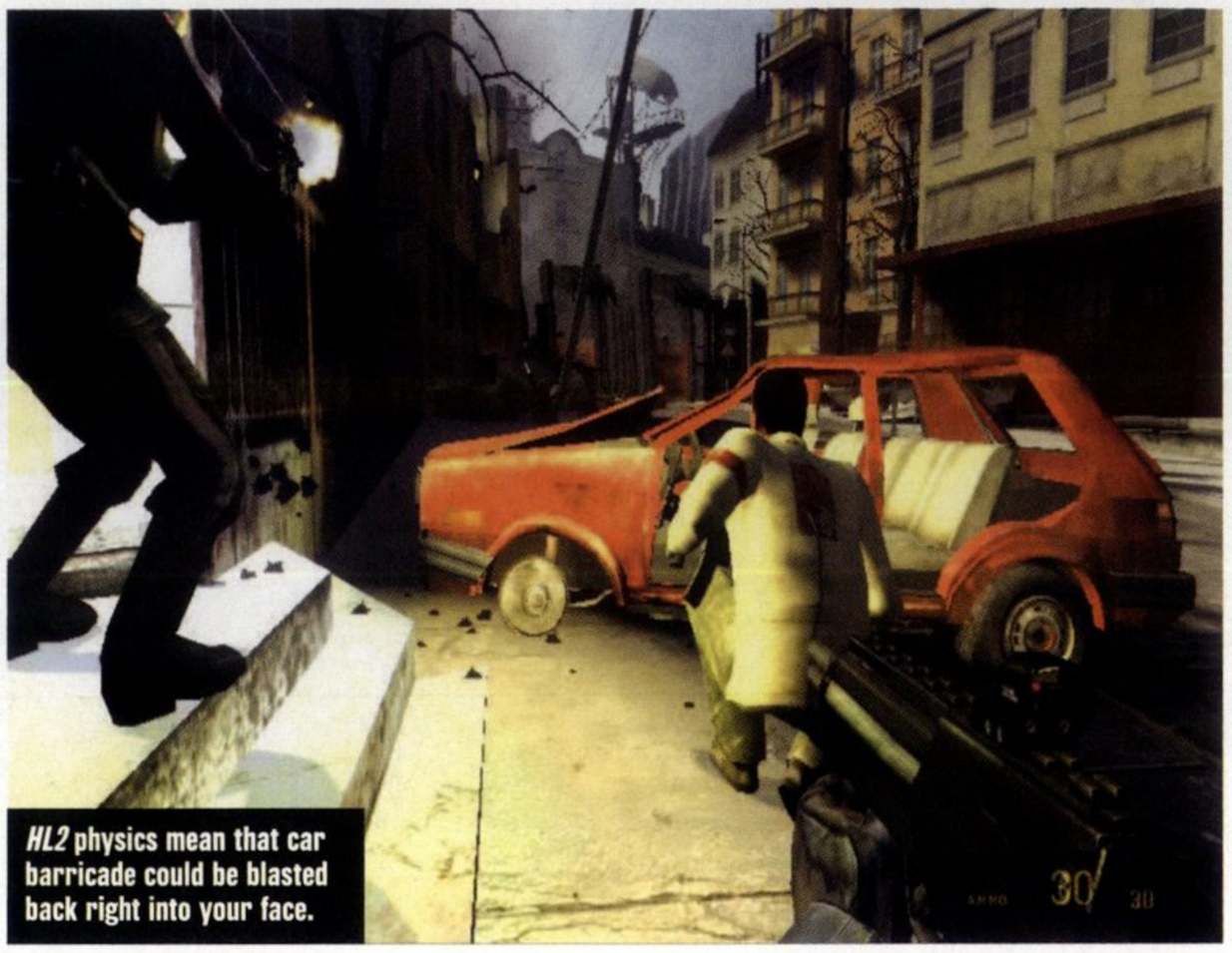
"The third leak came as something of a shock..."

Confirmed are 74 maps in various stages of assemblage, but none are truly playable. There are headcrab zombies, soldiers and other beasts at hand, but apparently they do not react to the player's presence. The screenshots we've seen paint a very different picture to the gandiose claims of the hackers. When compared to the official videos, the stolen levels are riddled with error messages and incomplete sections. AI is absent, sound effects rudimentary and the environment is missing most of its textures. Despite the 'latest build' rumours, it appears that the leak is a painfully early version of the game, possibly dating from before E3.

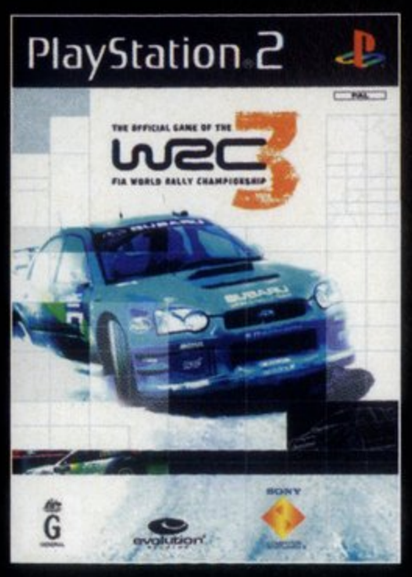
Clearly, the stolen code is not representative of the final game. It's a pale shadow of the world Valve have spent the last half decade planning and can only disappoint gamers who were never meant to play it. Sure, it does contain some details of game sections, character classes, weapon classes and vehicle specs. But it does not contain anything you haven't seen in the official Valve video releases and playing it provides nothing more than a fuzzy glimpse of the eventual game. There are no special weapons to play with beyond the anti-grav gun nor new aliens to slay. In its current state, it's like watching a movie without the actors and half the special effects missing.

The third leak has come as something of a shock, though. The original *Half-Life* and *Counter-Strike*, rendered by the Source engine, are online. Presumably Valve were planning to give them away anyway.

What seems certain is that the leak means *Half-Life 2* will not be released in 2003. Anti-cheat measures intended to protect Steam and the multi-player game have been compromised; cheats and hacks are already being compiled. So now we'll all have to wait until the holes are plugged. Ultimately, playing this flawed and stolen version is not worth the risk of ruining the final experience. Resist the download temptation.



***HL2* physics mean that car barricade could be blasted back right into your face.**



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au.playstation.com – www.wrc3-thegame.com

fun, anyone?

PlayStation 2

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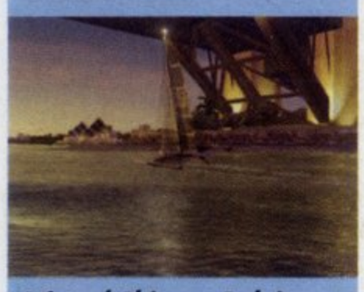
GOBBETS

MINGLE WITH SINGLES

Koch Media, and be careful how you say that, have announced they're bringing out *Singles*. This *Sims*-style simulator will see the player managing two people in a burgeoning relationship. With flirting, intimacy and "erotic actions!!" promised in the press release. See www.kochmedia.co.uk for more.

NO, NOT STRIPPER



***Virtual Skipper 3* claims to be the most advanced simulation of competitive sailing ever released. Features include day-and-night synching and real stretches of water faithfully recreated. Don't ask. *Virtual Skipper 3* will be sailing into the shops in November. www.virtualskipper.com.**

TRINITY CANCELLED:

Activision have announced the cancellation of their Matrix-inspired FPS *Trinity*. Developed by Grey Matter Studios, who gave us *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*, the conspiracy-laden RPG-lite was moving along really rather nicely, but now it's unlikely to see the light of day. The decision was made after Activision reported a downturn in profits, and with the focus of the gaming world very much on *Doom III*, one of next year's AAA releases, the publisher obviously wants to pour more resources into that particular title.

FLIGHT SIMULATION

IL-2 FORGOTTEN BATTLES EXPANSION PACK

Funnier climbs in sunnier climes.

Mr. Maddox's men have been so busy toiling away under the hoods of the 25+ flyable aircraft that will be crammed into this eclectic *FB* supplement they haven't got round to sorting out a proper title yet. We'd gladly help out if only we could think of something short and sweet that communicated the fact that with it you can be dogfighting Japan's finest fighter (the Frank) over balmy, palmy Pacific islands in a twin-tailed P-38 one minute, and hunting herds of lumbering B-17s in a rapier-like Komet jet, the next.

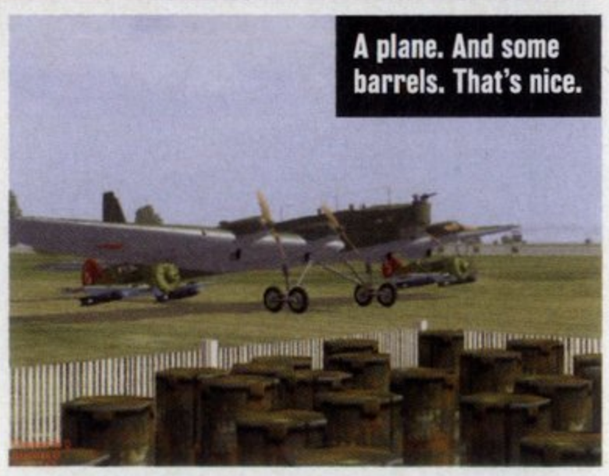
Ideally the moniker would also get across that you can man misbegotten monsters like the Mistral (an Me-109 with a pilotless 'suicide' bomber attached) and the SPB (a colossal Russian TB-3 with two launchable fighters lashed under its wings). Doodlebugs, flying wings, British biplanes... this pack has no apparent method to its madness but may actually end up better for it.

If the seven campaigns, score of single sorties, and dozen co-op missions to be included sound too involved, then the opportunities for short skirmishes above D-Day beaches and Bulge forests provided by new Normandy and Ardennes maps will surely appeal.

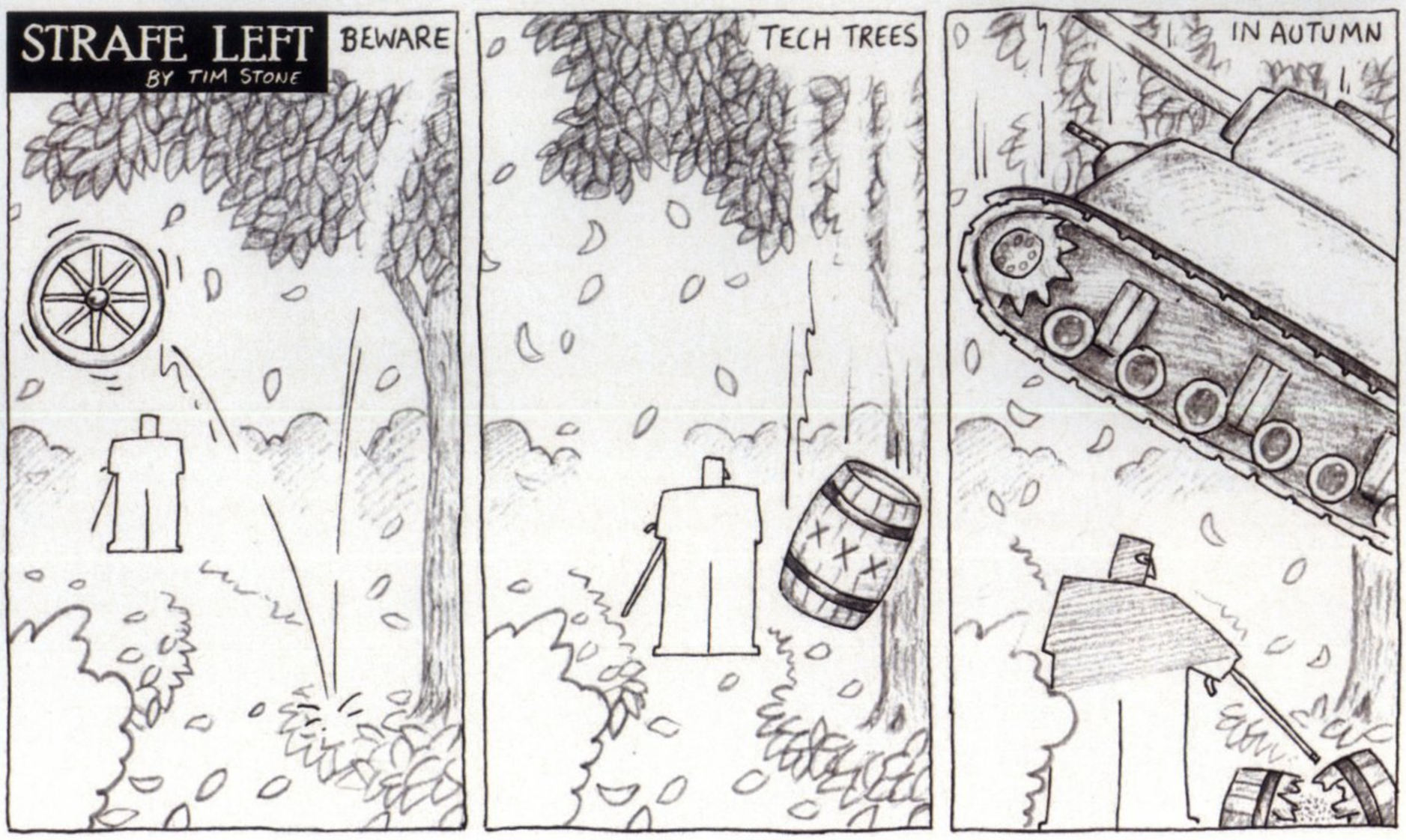
Beware the Hun in the sun. Or in the bonkers WWII flying machine.

Back on the title front, our Tim Stone has his fingers firmly crossed for "*FB: Firmamental Freaks*".

- **Release date** February 2004
- **Website** www.il2sturmovik.com



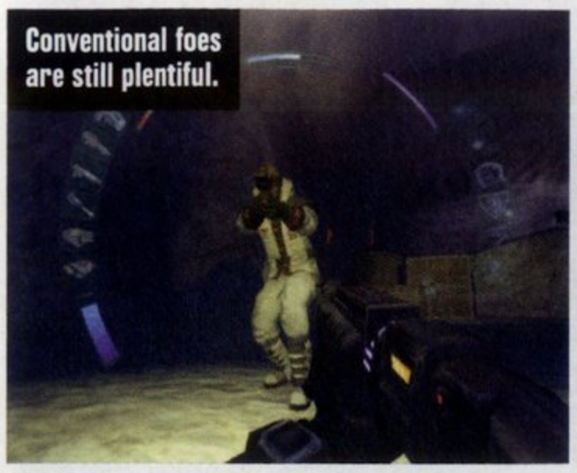
A plane. And some barrels. That's nice.



FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

So *that's* what an invisible war looks like.


Conventional foes are still plentiful.

Alien or shaved monkey? It's a tricky one.

It's been a touch quiet on the *Deus Ex 2* sequel front recently. We were starting to wonder if some sort of shadowy government operative had 'silenced the dev team, but it just seems we were being paranoid. But can you be too paranoid about a game that has bug-eyed grey aliens peering evilly into torchlight, as our new screenshot on the right shows?

It seems that while a lot of games have been screaming from the rooftops about their achievements, the *Deus Ex 2* team have just quietly carried on crafting something very special indeed.

ET's return is tantalising. The first game hinted that these creatures were bio-engineered monkeys. But exactly who was making them, and why, was never explained.

Are they really clever fakes, or... Or exactly who are we going to find ourselves at war *with*, in this invisible war? The Americans for a start. It looks like *Deus Ex* should, all going to plan, already have been released Stateside by the time you read this, while we – as usual – are going to have to wait until sometime in February to get hold of it. Or call up our nearest importer...

■ **Release date** February 2004
■ **Web site** www.deusex.com

SPACE OPERA

X2: ONLINE UNIVERSE

She cried MMO, MMO, MMO...

Koch Media managed to keep this one quiet. We can confirm that they're planning to take *X2* fully online before the end of next year. Following on from the impressive looking *X2: The Threat*, *X2: Online Universe* will take the living breathing single-player universe and expand it into a MMO space sim.

It's currently on the back burner until *X2* ships (see Slippage Central, page 18), but the idea is to offer a persistent universe, with an ebbing and flowing economy, backed up with a go anywhere, be anything attitude. Linked closely to the 150 sector single-player game, players or groups of players can take on the role of a government or even own whole sectors in the online universe.

Commodity trading will be a huge part of *X2* life, and aggressive buying and selling will be required in order to survive. Other devilish strategies being touted by Koch include the nasty practice of starving trade routes of essential goods and then moving in with your own, at an inflated price. Piracy will apparently be rewarded, but it's a cut-throat business.

It's difficult to sum up the sprawling potential of *X2: Online Universe* because it's so ambitious. But, along with *EVE Online*, it could be that *Elite* fans will get the game they've been waiting for all these years.

■ **Release date** Spring 2004
■ **Web site** www.online-universe.net

Mmm, nice sunspots.

Nice asteroids, too.

Nice all round, goddammit.

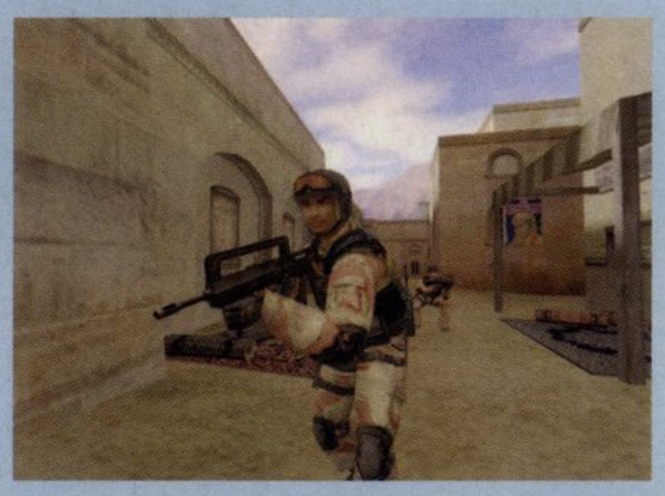
STILL TO COME

THESE ARE THE GAMES YOU *WON'T* BE PLAYING ANY TIME SOON.

HALF-LIFE 2

Vivendi/Valve

A bad month for Valve will probably see Gordon's latest adventure slip well into 2004. The signals have been confusing because Vivendi at first said the leak would cause slippage, then they said it's up to Valve and Valve have kept mum.



COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

Vivendi/Valve

Don't worry – it's not going to be too long before the modder's favourite makes its way to the shelves. It should have been in the shops as you were reading the last issue, but it really should-should be out by now. Keep an eye out for Steam news while you're at it.

BREED

CDV

It's slipped more than Charlie Chaplin ice-skating over banana peels, and it's gone straight down on its chin. Word is that *Breed* will be out sometime in December, so if you're bored by *Halo* and fancy some more Sci-Fi shootery, you know when you can get your fix.

RACING

RACE DRIVER 2

THE ULTIMATE RACING SIMULATOR

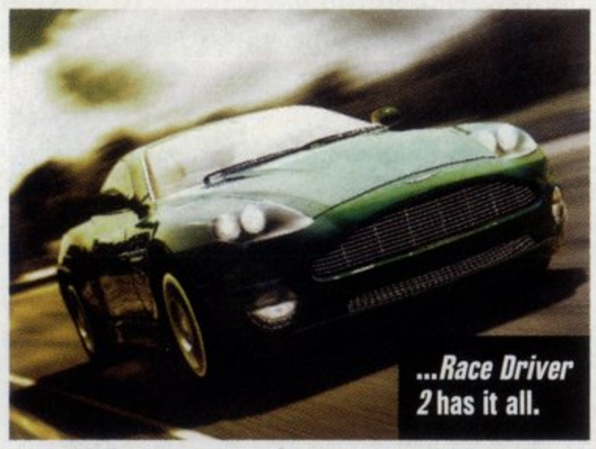
The last one ever? We doubt that.

Racing for trailer park types...

...Racing for millionaires.

It's the successor to the excellent *V8 Supercar Race Driver* series, but with the uniquely Aussie V8 bit dropped as *Race Driver* goes global. That means a far wider variety of vehicles will be on offer this time, even straying off the track and onto the street and rally course.

In all, there'll be more than 30 championships around the world, taking in Formula One, rallying, classic cars, off-road and the many global flavours of touring cars such as DTM. As before, you'll play a character whose career will (hopefully) progress as you win competitions. However, you're no longer Ryan McKane – you're *you*, and all the cut-scenes depicting new deals and 'plot' will play out in first-person. The ultimate prize: a drive in the Grand Prix race at the end of the game.



...*Race Driver 2* has it all.

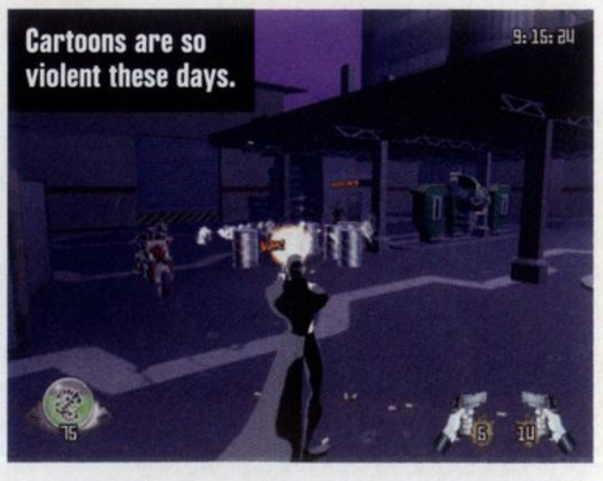
There'll naturally be a fleet of fancy motors to write off at your leisure – 35 have been announced including Aston Martins, Jags, and Mercedes, along with more typical motors like Fords and Mitsubishis. Bizarrely, there's also going be truck racing. Excellent.

■ **Release date** Winter 2004
■ **Website** www.codemasters.com

ACTION ADVENTURE

DRAKE

Take a gander at this.



Cartoons are so violent these days.

Majesco are attempting to Woo us all with this Hong Kong-based slice of pulp fiction bullet ballet, all done up in cartoon stylee.

You play Drake, the leader of the 99 Dragons Clan, vowing to avenge the murder of his gang (and your own) and recover a stolen artefact that can trap souls. Drake's been brought back from the dead, and carries with him all sorts of weapons and supernatural powers. And kung-fu.

It's looking like an anime cross between *Max Payne* and *The Matrix Reloaded*. The flickersome cel-shading gives the game a unique visual style but it faces some pretty stiff competition in the field. Majesco are talking it up though: "*Drake* combines astonishing cartoon-like visuals with intense action and a deep storyline, creating and experience much like starring in an interactive animated series or comic book," said Ken Gold, Vice President of Marketing. But then he would.

It has all the hallmarks of a excitingly brutal game, and we'll be sure to let you know how it does as soon as is humanly possible.

■ **Release date** December
■ **Website** www.majescogames.com

SPORTS SIMULATION

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER THE NEW LINE-UP

An uncertain pre-season for Eidos and Sports Interactive.

As the relationship between Eidos and Sports Interactive comes to a close with the release of *Championship Manager 03/04*, there's a hush surrounding both companies. Secret plans for the future of soccer management are being hatched.

This month's release of the season update will doubtless set the tills ringing once again, although whether it can match the record-breaking feats of previous releases in the wake of the bugs that blighted *CM4* remains to be seen. Both companies will now go their separate ways and go head-to-head over the next 12 months in a race to secure the lion's share of the huge market they once dominated together.

Eidos are already making moves to introduce their own brand by making some major alterations to a *Championship Manager 4* logo which only saw the light of day earlier this year, a glimpse of what's to come from them, perhaps. As part of an agreement between the two companies, SI are unable to unveil their plans for a new title until February, while Eidos must remain silent until *CM03/04* is released. However we do know that their game (*CM5*) and SI's future titles must have two distinct looks, which suggests that Eidos are likely to make the move away from the ultra-realistic slant of *CM4* and incorporate a 3D engine. The inclusion of 2D graphics in *CM4* was a revolution for the series but Sports Interactive have long stressed their intention to resist the move to 3D. It's likely that Eidos will have no such reservations.

With the race on to get a game on the shelves by the start of the next English Premier League season (August), courting a third party with an already established engine is therefore the likely option for Eidos, who have stressed their intent to bring the project in-house. It's going to be a very interesting winter. Watch this space.

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

COUNTER-STRIKE CONDITION ZERO

Don't believe the hype.

In a surprising case of a developer wanting the best for the customer, Valve have taken a lot of the reviews of *Condition Zero*, their professionally produced *Counter-Strike* update to heart. It seems they've rewritten significant portions of the game.

Apparently the review code we played, and gave a middling 65% in PCGA #15, simply wasn't good enough for Valve. They've handed the reins over to Turtle Rock Studios, a small start-up company comprised of ex-Westwood and EA members. This team has added a new challenge mode and shifted around some of the missions Ritual worked on. We've yet to see any of this running, however, and in fact the re-worked game will reach us after it hits the shops. Rest assured, if all this fiddling has any impact on our previous review, we'll be sure to let you know.

■ **Web site**
www.valve software.com
■ **Release**
Out now

GOBBETS

HOLY ROLLER

Digital Jesters have announced a *Divine Divinity*-themed RPG. *Riftrunner* is set in the same universe as the holy-sounding original. The RPG will be stuffed with the usual genre elements as well as a "battlefield generator" to give you some randomly built additions to the whole package. It won't be out until February next year, but you can check out www.riftrunner .com until we get our hands on it.

SOUNDS GNASH

Every cartoon has to have a racing game attached to it. Even UK favourite Dennis The Menace is now getting his own carting game in the form of *Beanotown Racing*. Screech around the streets against Pug, Gnasher, Roger the Dodger and chums. It's out very soon, readers. www.beanotown.com

ILLUSTRATION: STEVE LILLIE

DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

RANTINGS FROM THE SOAPBOX OF GAMING

ARE DEVELOPERS, CRITICS AND PLAYERS SCORING AN OWN GOAL BY IGNORING AN ENTIRE GENRE? KICK OFF THE USUAL STREAM OF SELF-RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION AT **PCGA@DERWENTHOWARD.COM.AU**

There is a genre of videogames that will never receive a score higher than 86% in PC Games Addict, yet it's the genre we should be examining with a fine-tooth comb, learning from its successes. We're talking about the sports game.

We associate the sports game with yearly updates and little else. Why? Because we're snobs. We believe that a game that looks and plays in a similar way to its last iteration is somehow a lesser game. That attitude is wrong.

Sports games come with a certain amount of baggage – we understand the rules behind them, we accept the setting and we appreciate the basic strategies. That baggage is important; if developers strive to make games that we want to play then they should be working on themes relevant to our daily lives. Orcs, space flight and medieval frippery should be abandoned right now, in favour of subject matter that taps into our concerns: ideas culled from tabloid front pages. Or back pages.

We want our videogames to be relevant. We want our aunties and uncles to sit down with us at Christmas and play for hours. We'd like them to understand that this time we spend in front of the cathode ray is important to us, and it could be important for them too. Offer them a bout on *Q3DM4* and they'll rail against it, rejecting the thought out of hand. But 22 men punting pigskin around the great stadiums of the world can, or rather could, provide a revolutionary spark.

But we're still missing the point. Here's another. Careful, it's spiky. Games are designed by teams and teams are made up from individuals. Individuals can be guided, but they'll always bring their own ideas or interpretations to a project. This is bad for coherency. An example: the *Thief* level designers use windows in different ways. For some, they're just stage dressing. Others interpret them as new, legitimate routes into your objective. You're required to rethink your approach to a situation depending on the tools available. Changing those tools causes untold grief.

Sports games get around this in a really interesting way. Their rules are set in stone. They don't need a strong producer to lay down the law to his programming team in a convoluted design document, because everyone has an intimate understanding of the subject. A corner kick is a corner kick at Wembley, Nou Camp and backyard lots the world over. Soccer games now offer no coherence concerns; their iterative updates have weedled out every possible bug, quirk or irrelevancy. They're the ultimate refined software,with no sharp edges to cut into the immersion and spoil things.

Tim Edwards is an international word hobo and as homeless as they come. He's never happier than when safely ensconced on a colleague's sofa, eating their food and drinking their wine. His love is free to a good home. Pity him.

***Deathball*, in the premier league of *UT2003* mods**

"Orcs, space flight and medieval frippery should be abandoned right now."

And designers have gathered this. New features are added slowly. They're tracked, focus tested and evaluated. There are no special cases or chances for a developer to lay down their interpretation of how a game should play. The sport is the goal in itself – all aesthetic concerns are over-ruled by the simple quest for, if not necessarily realism, then a practicality.

But that's still not really getting to the heart of the matter. Here's yet another idea. Gamers and critics are starting to understand 'emergence', that catchall term for unscripted situations that evolve from simple interactions with existing game elements. We always use pretentious, first-person centric examples to illustrate it, but here's a better one. Bayern Munich are holding Manchester United to a one all draw at Old Trafford. The second half is end to end, shots are edged over the bar, the keepers earn their, umm, keep, until finally, my centre-forward is brought down in the penalty box in the last ten minutes. It's a perfect narrative formed from my interaction with eleven AI men.

It's special.

Now we're finally getting somewhere. I want you to remember one fact from this piece. I love sports games, and I hate being ostracised for it. Stop dismissing me.

This man knows the score.

One day, all games will look as good as this.

ACTION ADVENTURE

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW

...then Medusa on Friday, and Helen of Troy over the weekend.

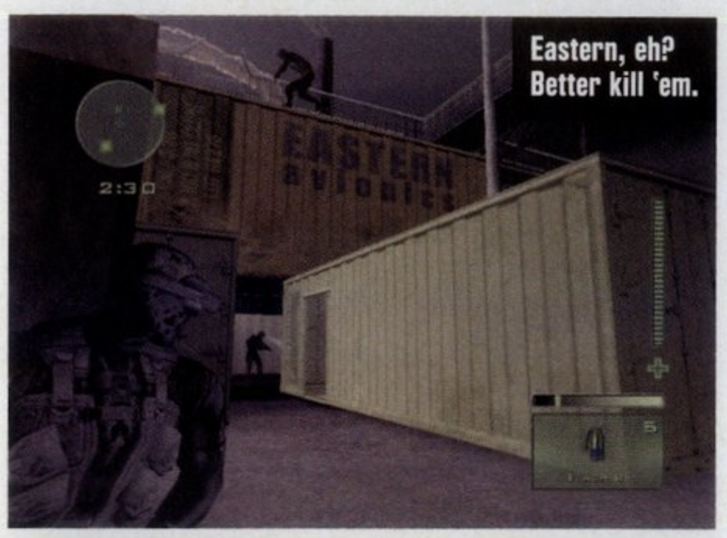
The first sequel to the mega-selling *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell* is currently in development. Special Operative Sam Fisher returns after saving the world from the eastern-bloc's uppity inhabitants. Hoorah for America!

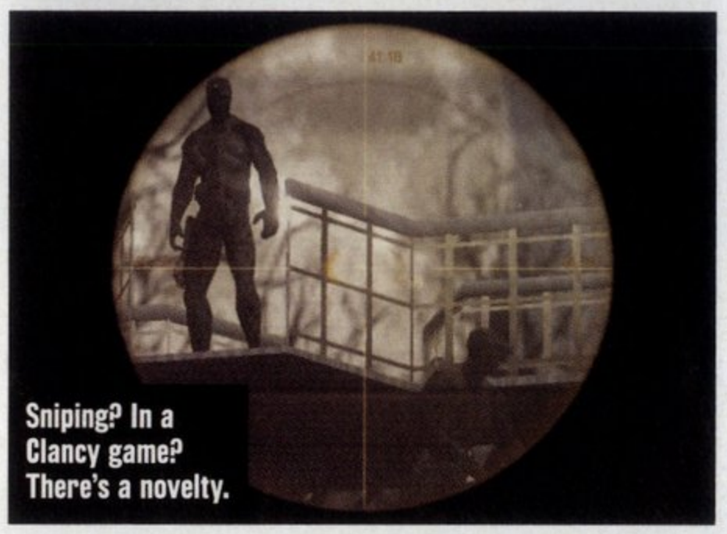
What all *Splinter Cell* fans have been waiting for and what the game now promises is online multi-player. Infiltration of the levels with two or more players at a time is an intriguing proposition. Looking at the screenshots, you can't help but hum the Mission: Impossible theme as multiple Fisher-men storm the unnamed building, one running above the guards, the other watching as he goes. The multiple insertion operatives are brought in for missions deemed too tough for a single-player, so it seems the multi-player will be a separate story to the single-player. There's nothing to suggest anything other than co-operative multi-player, as yet.

And there's more. The settings promise to be more exotic this time, the latest excerpts show Sam sneaking through palm-treed glades, and he's obviously not doing a spot of gardening. They've promised more weapons, gadgetry, cool moves and the sort of cinematic beauty that the first game exhibited.

The strength of the original was that it ramped the tension through the roof, as the dark, gadget-packed game of hide-and-seek unfolded. More of the same will be a welcome addition. We'll have more on this soon.

■ **Release date** 2004
■ **Web site** www.splintercell.com





ROLE PLAYING GAME

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS HORDES OF THE UNDERDARK

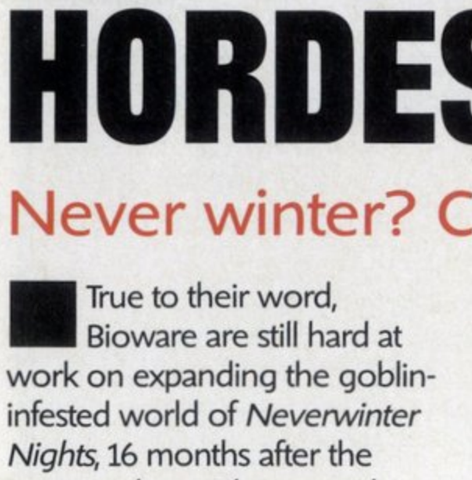
Never winter? Can't be Victoria, then. We like this game already.

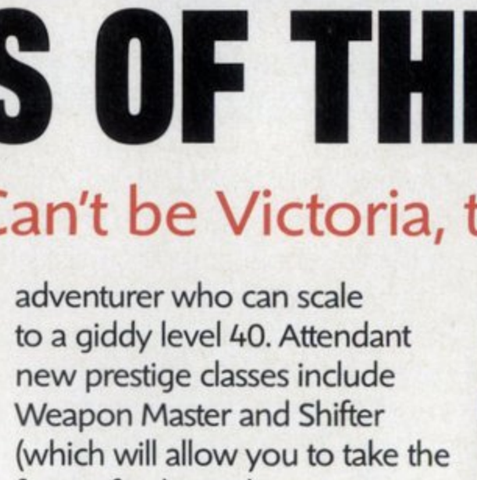
True to their word, Bioware are still hard at work on expanding the goblin-infested world of *Neverwinter Nights*, 16 months after the game's release. The second expansion, *Hordes of the Underdark*, drips with extras that will set seasoned fans drooling.

Rather than starting with kitten-weak characters, you'll begin with a fairly tough adventurer who can scale to a giddy level 40. Attendant new prestige classes include Weapon Master and Shifter (which will allow you to take the form of a dragon).

This is the Underdark, folks, so expect Drow, Beholders, Mind Flayers and many more.

■ **Web site** http://nwn.bioware.com/underdark
■ **Release** December





GOBBETS

IT'S A JURASSIC PARK

Chris Sawyer's been busy. He's got another add-on pack for *Rollercoaster Tycoon* coming out. *Rollercoaster: Time Twister*. You can apply Prehistoric Age and have T-Rexes stomp their way through the legs of the tracks, or perhaps zoom off to the future and give the public gleaming, LED- covered space rangers. There's a whole gamut of in-between as well, including the Roaring '20s through to the Rock and Roll era '50s.

I, I

Tired pun aside, we've had a look at *I Of The Enemy*, Enemy Technology's retro-strategy game. The independently produced *C&C*-alike is more interested in tactics and strategy rather than resource building, so gone is the usual plate-spinning So far it's looking basic, but the intention is to build up the reputation through good play; the graphics will come later. Have a peek at www.enemy technology.com.

GOBBETS

RELIC UNCOVERED.

The *Homeworld* development team have released the tools they made the game with on their network. With the sequel being released and the first one selling for a fiver, they decided to get all generous. Anyone interested in rooting around with code that still has the power to wow can scoot off to their website and sign up as a modder. You need to register, but that's a painless process. Now someone remake *Elite* and make Craig happy.
www.relic.com/rdn

HALO, HALO

We're betting this is a

record, but at the time of writing, there have already been two patches released for *Halo*. That might not sound too bad, but considering that the first of these patches was released before the game was, we're somewhat amused. *Halo* was one of the other big name games this year to suffer a leak to the internet, and the patches are there for legitimate users to be kept away from the nasty hacked versions.

POLIS RETURNS...

Polisman's sidekick Dirty Churchy is trapped on the

Planet of Women. Our hero selflessly offers his body in exchange for Churchy's freedom. Is this the end? Tune in next year, reader.

THE SPY

THEY SEEK IT HERE, THEY SEEK IT THERE, THEY SEEK THE PHANTOM EVERYWHERE.

They try not to bash consoles on PC Games Addict, as they're all gamers at heart. Bless. So they sent Yours Truly into the depths of console-land to bring you the story on The Phantom, Infinium Lab's addition to the gaming world. Why is The Spy bringing you console news at all? Because it's PC-based console news, that's why.

It's a set-top box, probably what everyone imagined when they heard the Xbox was in development. The Phantom has a hard drive, an internet connection, and a controller. But where Microsoft was based on PC architecture, The Phantom just wholesale rips it off.

Yes, it apparently plays PC games, giving cheeky Infinium the freedom to boast that it'll be launching with the largest games library of any console. There's no disc drive in The Phantom. All the content is downloaded by your always-on broadband connection and saved to the hard drive.

Content then. Well, it'll be available through subscription plans, yet to be devised, but there'll be several packages catering for the casual gamer all the way up to the hardcore. There will be rental schemes in place, letting you pay as you play. It also caters for MMO games playing, all from the comfort of your own sofa.

Just like home PCs, you'll be able to choose from a range of configurable technology. Graphics cards, RAM and hard drive space are all up to you, but there's no word if you can upgrade a single part if you want to. The Spy wonders if a keyboard will eventually be developed, or how they'll get past the low resolution most TVs have.

"It'll launch with the largest games library of any console..."

Current plans are to release the console sometime in 2004. Those looking for any more info can scoot over to www.infiniumlabs.com, though many commentators refuse to believe the Phantom project will ever see the light of day.

There've been a few blips on The Spy's games radar this month, and the developers better be warned: I'm rooting around in your private files as you read this. How else do you think I get so much information? Oh, you want proof do you?

For those looking for carnage, you can put some money on a certain Cold War squad shooter arriving in some guise in 2004. Not a full-blown sequel to the massive-selling original, but more than an add-on pack. It'll be new and exciting and should hold the fanbase together until the sequel appears, possibly in 2005.

It emerges that IO Interactive are working full-pelt on a new *Hitman* game too. Following on from 47's last opus, all we have is the working title *Hitman: Contract*. Such a move was inevitable, as the last one sold bucketloads. And that name: could we be seeing Number 47 taking on jobs according to the monetary value? Are they going freeform? *Elite* with baldies? Let's hope so.

Also doing the rounds on the consoles is the *GTA*-alike *True Crime: Streets of LA*. Word is that we'll be seeing it on the PC if it does well on the GC, PS2 and Xbox. Current opinion on that seems to be inconclusive at best. It's unlikely to be a massive smash, though.

Argh, the 'net hounds are on me. I can feel the connections being severed as I type this. I'd better sign off, before my 1337 h4><0r-ing causes too much damage to the release schedules. Spy out.

THE OFFICIAL PC GAMES addict TOP TEN

1		Medal of Honour: Breakthrough	Electronic Arts
2		C&C: Generals – Zero Hour	Electronic Arts
3		Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy	Activision
4	(3)	Championship Manager 4	Eidos
5		Homeworld 2	Vivendi
6	(1)	The Sims: Superstar	Electronic Arts
7		UFO: Aftermath	Cenega
8		Age of Mythology: The Titans	Microsoft
9	(2)	The Sims	Electronic Arts
10		Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior	THQ

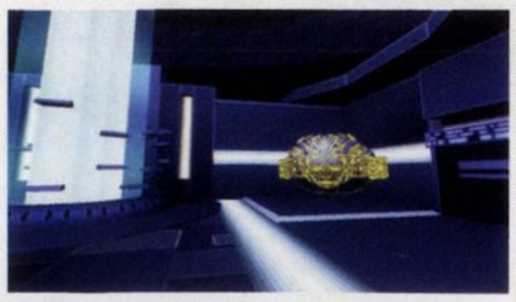
Charts compiled by Inform (www.informbd.com.au)

inform *Charts can be viewed at* **www.informbd.com.au** *as part of Inform's comprehensive database of online market intelligence, updated weekly*

Inform tracks the weekly sales of business and leisure technology products, and provides detailed reports to subscribers and Reseller & Retail panel members. For subscription or panel membership details phone 02 9264 0095. Copyright © 2002 by Inform. All rights reserved.

PC GAMES addict RECOMMENDED

SUMMER'S HERE, BUT PLAYING THESE GAMES IS MUCH MORE FUN THAN WEARING SPEEDOS.



Tron 2.0

80%

Beautiful, innovative first-person shooter that sticks you right inside your beige box. It's mentioned here to get you people off your arses and buying it, because it's actually slipped right off the chart already, which is a shame. Worth a look.

Homeworld 2

90%

It's simply the most eloquent, gorgeously addictive RTS released this year. Float through the nebulous clouds, grabbing asteroids and launching fighters while vying for your existence among the stars. Wonderful, spellbinding stuff.

Halo: Combat Evolved

91%

It finally makes it all the way to PC, and still proves it has what it takes. Superlative AI, great action and a multiplayer mode destined to be a classic. Find out what everyone's been talking about.

Worms 3D

90%

The flat worms come out all a 3D, and it works better than anyone could have imagined. The addictive-as-crack core of the *Worms* appeal is still there, but it's all been fleshed out, so to speak. You'd be a fool to miss this absolute corker.

DONE WHEN IT'S DONE

Key to charts **New entry this month** ● *Sounds about right to us* ● *Are you really sure about that?* ● *Yeah, right. Dream on, buddy.*

GAME NAME	PUBLISHER	LATEST RELEASE DATE	
Apocalyptica	Konami	November	●
Armed & Dangerous	Activision	Christmas	●
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubi Soft	November	●
Black & White 2	Electronic Arts	2004	●
Breed	CDV	November	●
Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth	TBA	2004	●
Contract J.A.C.K.	Vivendi	November	●
Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars	CDV	Late 2004	●
Crazy Taxi 3	Empire	November	●
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft	TBA	
Delta Force Black Hawk Down Team Sabre	Novalogic	Early 2004	●
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	February 2004	●
Doom 3	Activision	2004	●
Duke Nukem Forever	Rockstar	2004	
Dungeon Siege: Legends of Aranna	Microsoft	November	●
Dungeon Siege 2	Microsoft	2004	●
Dungeons & Dragons Online	Atari	2005	●
Drake	Vivendi	December	●
Driver 3	Atari	Autumn 2004	●
Everquest II	Ubi Soft	2004	●
Evil Genius	Vivendi	2004	●
Far Cry	Ubi Soft	December	●
Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	Winter 2004	●
Ground Control 2	Vivendi	March 2004	●
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	2004	●
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	November	●
IL-2 Sturmovik Expansion	Ubi Soft	February 2004	●
Joint Operations	Novalogic	March 2004	●
Kingdom Under Fire: Crusaders	Phantagram	TBA	
Lock On: Modern Air Combat	Ubi Soft	December	●
Lords of Everquest	Ubi Soft	December	●
Lords of the Realm III	Vivendi	February 2004	●
March! Off-World Recon	Oxygen	November	●
Max Payne 2	Rockstar	October	●
Medal of Honour: Pacific Assault	Electronic Arts	Autumn 2004	●
Men of Valour: Vietnam	Vivendi	Spring 2004	●
Middle Earth Online	Vivendi	2004	●
Need For Speed: Underground	Electronic Arts	November	●
Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark	Atari	December	●
Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	2005	●
Codename: Panzers	CDV	Autumn 2004	●
Pirates!	Atari	2004	●
Prince of Persia: Sands of Time	Ubi Soft	December	●
Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	November	●
Quake IV	Activision	2004	
Race Driver 2: Ultimate Racing Simulator	Codemasters	Winter 2004	●
Richard Burns Rally	SCi	March 2004	●
Rome: Total War	Activision	Autumn 2004	●
Sam & Max: Freelance Police	Activision	March 2004	●
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	Activision	November	●
Singles	Koch	December	●
Sniper Elite	Wanadoo	Early 2004	●
Soldner: Secret Wars	Bigben	March 2004	●
Spellforce	Bigben	November	●
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubi Soft	Early 2004	●
S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Oblivion Lost	THQ	Winter 2004	●
Star Wars: Galaxies	Activision	November	●
Star Wars: KOTOR	Activision	November	●
Star Wars: Republic Commando	Activision	TBA	
SWAT 4: Urban Justice	Vivendi	TBA	
Team Fortress 2	Vivendi	TBA	
Terminator 3: War of the Machines	Atari	November	●
The Longest Journey 2	Funcom	TBA	
The Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle Earth	Electronic Arts	Winter 2004	●
The Lord of the Rings: Middle-Earth Online	Vivendi	Summer 2004	●
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	November	●
The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Ring	Vivendi	Early 2004	●
The Matrix Online	Atari	TBA	
The Movies	Activision	2004	●
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	Autumn 2004	
Thief	Eidos	2004	●
Total Annihilation 2	Phantagram	2004	●
Total Club Manager 2004	Electronic Arts	November	●
Tremors	Conspiracy Entertainment	Spring 2003	●
Tribes Vengeance	Vivendi	Late 2004	●
Trinity	Activision	Autumn 2004	●
Ultima X Odyssey	Electronic Arts	Summer 2003	●
Universal Combat	Dreamcatcher	November	●
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	November	●
Unreal Warfare	Atari	TBA	
Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines	Activision	Autumn 2004	●
Vietcong Fist Alpha	Gathering	October	●
Warhammer Online	Sega	Autumn 2004	●
World of Warcraft	Vivendi	December	●
X2: Online Universe	Koch	Spring 2004	●
X2: The Threat	Koch	2004	●

THIS MONTH IN GAMES

WELCOME TO OUR GENRE-SPECIFIC NEWS SECTION, FEATURING ALL THE MONTH'S HIGHLIGHTS. DIGEST, THEN EMAIL US YOUR THOUGHTS AT **pcga@derwenthoward.com.au** TO HAVE YOUR SAY.

THE MONTH IN FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS

■ Jim Rossignol

BAH, Sutherns has kicked me off the multi-player games slot. So I get to head up the ever fascinating First-Person Shooter column: Well, hello FPS fans! I trust you're all keeping well. Talk of the town is, of course, the code-leakage of *Half-Life 2*, but we shouldn't dwell on such things, not when there's games aplenty to get stuck into (not least of which is *Call of Duty*, reviewed on page 50). Just avoid *Mace Griffin*. It really does depress the already seasonally-affected Rossignol mind.

But I wanted to talk quickly about another up and coming game: *Far Cry*. People have debated whether it's likely to live up to the hype about the AI and team-combat, as well as looking luscious. Well we had a play of it and while there were some problems (such as not being able to look at the sun without the frame-rate falling through the floor) these will no doubt be ironed out before release. The core of the game though was solid enough – your enemies yell to each other to co-ordinate their actions and, in one jungle skirmish, I felt genuinely pinned down and surrounded by the well-armed bad-honchos. This then is the word from the frontline: we've high hopes for *Far Cry* and with *XIII* also packing some stylish punches, Ubi Soft look to have a successful year. (And look: no sequels!)

"IN ONE JUNGLE SKIRMISH, I FELT GENUINELY PINNED-DOWN AND SURROUNDED..."

Finally, an aside for the fang-fans out there: watch out for *Nosferatu*, a up and coming vampire-shooter. It's not looking that exciting, but has 'random architecture' which might be quite interesting. Sadly it's not actually a licence of the Kinski-Herzog film.

Further Links

www.farcry-thegame.com
■ A far cry from *Mace Griffin*. Ahahaha.
www.nosferatu-game.com
■ Surreal, and unintentionally hilarious.

THE MONTH IN ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

■ Ross Atherton

IF the phrases 'Tarjan', 'El Cid's Fire Horn' and 'four times 99 berserkers' mean anything to you, you'll be as pleased as I am to hear about a modern remake of classic RPG *The Bard's Tale*. Brian Fargo, creator of the original Apple II (and C64, Amiga, PC, ST and even NES) series and former big cheese at Interplay, has revived the name, a feat possible since original owners EA let the licence lapse by not using it. Heh.

"FARGO IS INSISTENT THAT THE NEW *BARD'S TALE* WILL BREAK NEW STORY-TELLING GROUND."

His new development house InXile Entertainment are already a year into the project, which will also be released for PS2. But whereas the original games laid down so many of the clichés which the genre is arguably still following, Fargo is insistent that the new *Bard's Tale* (pictured) will delve more deeply into character and break new story-telling ground. Although the man in charge has the original series, *Wasteland* and the *Fallout* games on his CV, not to mention a lengthy association with Black Isle, I'm strongly anticipating a lightweight approach intended to work well on the consoles. Bah.

In other news, I recently finished *Knights of the Old Republic* on Xbox – which I loved – and then got to play it all the way through it again on PC. You can read all about it on page 38. I've been trying to keep spoilers out of my feature while still conveying the excellent time I've had, despite having to contend with RSI and staying up very late to play the game every night.

Finally, a little site update: go see the *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* new website (below). Bloody good.

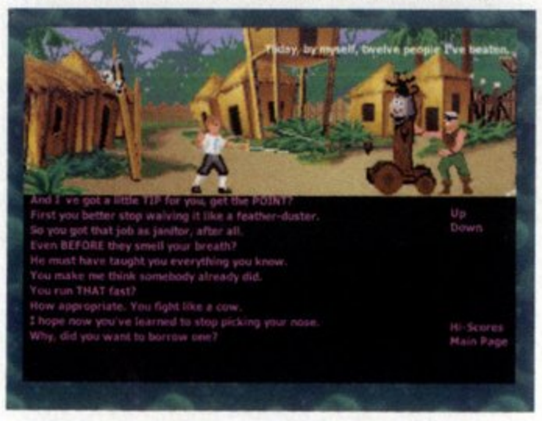
Further Links

www.inxile-entertainment.com
■ Do you know the way to Skara Brae?
www.vampirebloodlines.com
■ Better than Blade. Not as good a name as Rossferatu.

THE MONTH IN ACTION-ADVENTURE GAMES

■ Kieron Gillen

FOR once, let's see if we can weight this column a little more heavily towards adventure rather than action, and in the month when the much-awaited *Broken Sword 3* slinks its newly polygonal body into the spotlight, we may – just may – be able to do it. Revolution's game is clearly the big news, and I've been receiving regular messages through Trillian from reviewer Walker discussing his progress and budding relationship with Benevolent Uncle Charles Cecil. In short... oh, go and read the review, you lazy things.


Today, by myself, twelve people I've beaten.
And I've got a little YIP for you, get the POINT?
First you better stop waiving it like a feather-duster.
So you got that job as janitor, after all.
Even BEFORE they smell your breath?
He must have taught you everything you know.
You make me think somebody already did.
You run THAT fast?
How appropriate. You fight like a cow.
I hope now you've learned to stop picking your nose.
Why, did you want to borrow one?
Up
Down
Hi-Scores
Main Page

"IN SHORT... OH, GO AND READ THE *BROKEN SWORD* REVIEW, YOU LAZY THINGS."

On a more underground note, the Independent Games Festival isn't the only indie event where judging is underway. Our old friends in the Interactive Fiction community have just presented the entries for this year's IF Comp – the ninth, for those who are counting. These are available for download and, if you've played five of them, voting. After the finalists have been announced, we'll try and squeeze some onto the coverdisk for your delectation. I haven't had time to play any of them yet, since the entrants have only just been announced at the time of writing, but our favourite titles are Mikko Vuorinen's *The Adventures of the President of the United States*, Kristian Kirsfeldt's *Rape, Pillage, Gallore!* and the Rossignol-esque excellence of Daniel Freas' *The Erudition Chamber*.

And as a final adventure note, wander over to the SCUMM bar and play the swordfighting sections of *Monkey Island* in a mini game. Hurrah!

Further Links

www.ifcomp.org/comp03/
■ Interactive Fiction Awards
www.scummbar.com/community/games/swordfighting/index.php
■ Wit-fight.

THE MONTH IN SIMULATION GAMES

■ Tim Stone

EVEN the most rabid dog people would surely object to keeping a cat confined to a bag for over a year but that's exactly what the mean Mr. Maddox (with our shameful complicity) is guilty of. The imprisoned feline – *BoB* (or *Battle of Britain* to give it its full name) – was finally freed at the recent flight-sim show in Birmingham and looked none-the-worst for the ordeal.

"1C:MADDOX'S EXTRAORDINARILY GENEROUS FREE ADD-ONS MAY SOON BE JUST A FOND MEMORY."

Well, in truth, there was actually precious little of it to see, besides a few encouraging screenshots of highly detailed ground vehicle models (shared with the company's upcoming WWII RTS *Battlefield Command*) but mention of a new engine, improved weather, radar, and King Kong-sized furballs was enough to send most of the assembled faithful (ourselves included) into raptures.

In the year or so until *Battle of Britian* arrives, the fabulous *IL-2 Sturmovik: Forgotten Battles* will be drawing strength from an exciting official supplement as well as several third-party mission packs. In the face of commercial pressures and the constant carping of ungrateful fans, 1C:Maddox's extraordinarily generous free add-ons, may soon be just a fond memory, but one last handout including flyable Mustangs and Zeros, and extra maps is scheduled for February.

Other show highlights included the *Lock-On* stand where I chewed the fat with producer Matt Wagner on topics like the chance of a Tornado add-on (not out of the question by any means) and the newly announced *Falcon 4.0 Gold*, a title that has been met with suspicion by many *Falcon* fans.

Further Links

www.frugalsworld.com
■ Two different perspectives on...
www.falcon4gold.com
■ ...*Falcon 4.0 Gold*.

THE MONTH IN MULTI-PLAYER/ONLINE GAMES

■ Mark Sutherns

HAVING reached minor levels of starvation, dehydration and exhaustion with only a Twi'lek from Seattle for company I've been able to empathise with Thailand's gamers recently. They've been taking their online exploits, specifically involving the monstrously popular *Ragnorak Online*, so seriously their Government felt required to introduce a ban. Having blocked all local and overseas servers between the hours of 10pm and 6am the powers that be have at least relaxed things a little this month.

"*PLANETSIDE* IS ABOUT TO BE TRANSFORMED BY A TOTAL OVERHAUL OF THE XP SYSTEM."

While the Thais remain cruelly shackled Sony Online have announced a huge list of enhancements and changes for *PlanetSide* players prior to the release of the first expansion, *Core Combat*. As we alluded to in NetGamer last month, the MMO shooter is about to be transformed by a total overhaul of the XP system, with the awards for facility-capturing cut dramatically in an attempt to spawn conflicts outside of bases. Whether the flagging numbers on the servers can support such a new dynamic remains to be seen but its worth noting that you can still get yourself a seven-day trial from the official site. Appetites whetted in this month's online diary too.

Finally, I couldn't leave you without picking up on the recent announcement that none other than Peter Gabriel will be providing the soundtrack for the forthcoming MMO *Myst* title, *Ur: Beyond Ages of Myst*. An inspired choice that completely shatters *Myst*'s middle-aged executive stereotype.

Further Links

www.anarchy-online.com
■ Get *Shadowlands* down your uber pipe.
http://uru.ubi.com/us/
■ Contain yourselves.

THE MONTH IN STRATEGY GAMES

■ Richard Cobbett

WHILE there isn't a huge amount going on in the commercial strategy world, you may have noticed a little event called the Independent Games Festival taking place over the next few months. Don't mistake this for a humble 'game creation contest' – this is about proper games, with budgets and everything, competing against each other, but without the marketdroids insisting that they be a Tolkien-themed version of *Warcraft III*. To take a purely hypothetical example. Needless to say, strategy is well covered, both in conventional multi-player puzzle games and more outright wargaming.

"...CAN BEST BE DESCRIBED AS A MIX OF *CIVILISATION, MINESWEEPER*, AND *PACMAN*."

One in particular that caught my eye was *Oasis*, which can best be described as a mix of *Civilisation*, *Minesweeper* and *Pacman*. Playing as a desert ruler, you have to speed around the map of your kingdom, building up your population and empire alike by uncovering squares, developing cities and implementing mines and road networks, in readiness for an attack by the Barbarian Horde. Others of interest include *Bontago*, which involves conquering a playfield by filling it with flags and physics-enabled boxes, and *Savage* – currently picking up a fair fanbase over in the US for its melding of FPS and RTS action, with one player handling the strategy and the others wielding the weapons. More conventionally, there's *Spartan*, or *Greek: Turnbased War*, if you will. While not all of the games are downloadable, you can find all the entrants at www.igf.com. Take a look.

Further Links

www.mind-control.com
■ Many carrots, one stick. *Oasis* may be a simple game, but so's Draughts
www.warofthering.com
■ *Warcraft*, huh? What is it good for? Vivendi, apparently.

THE INSIDER

SPLINTER GROUP FOILED WHILE GMX DIVE DIVE DIVE.

Publishing giants Ubi Soft and Electronic Arts have gone head to head via their lawyers this month after the French company brought legal action against five former employees. All five had been members of Ubi Soft's *Splinter Cell* development team who had left their roles to take up positions at EA's newly opened Montreal office. However, Ubi Soft have moved on a contract clause that prevents their workers taking a place on the payroll of another North American games developer for 12 months. Electronic Arts aren't happy.

"This legal action basically destroys their careers. They either have to move out of Montreal or work at McDonalds for a year," ranted Geoff Brown, EA's VP for corporate communications. Mmm... careful with those analogies Geoff.

More legal handbags are being brandished by Vivendi and Interplay. The dispute concerns allegations from Vivendi that Interplay have been trying to escape a distribution deal which Interplay have rebutted with accusations of unpaid fees.

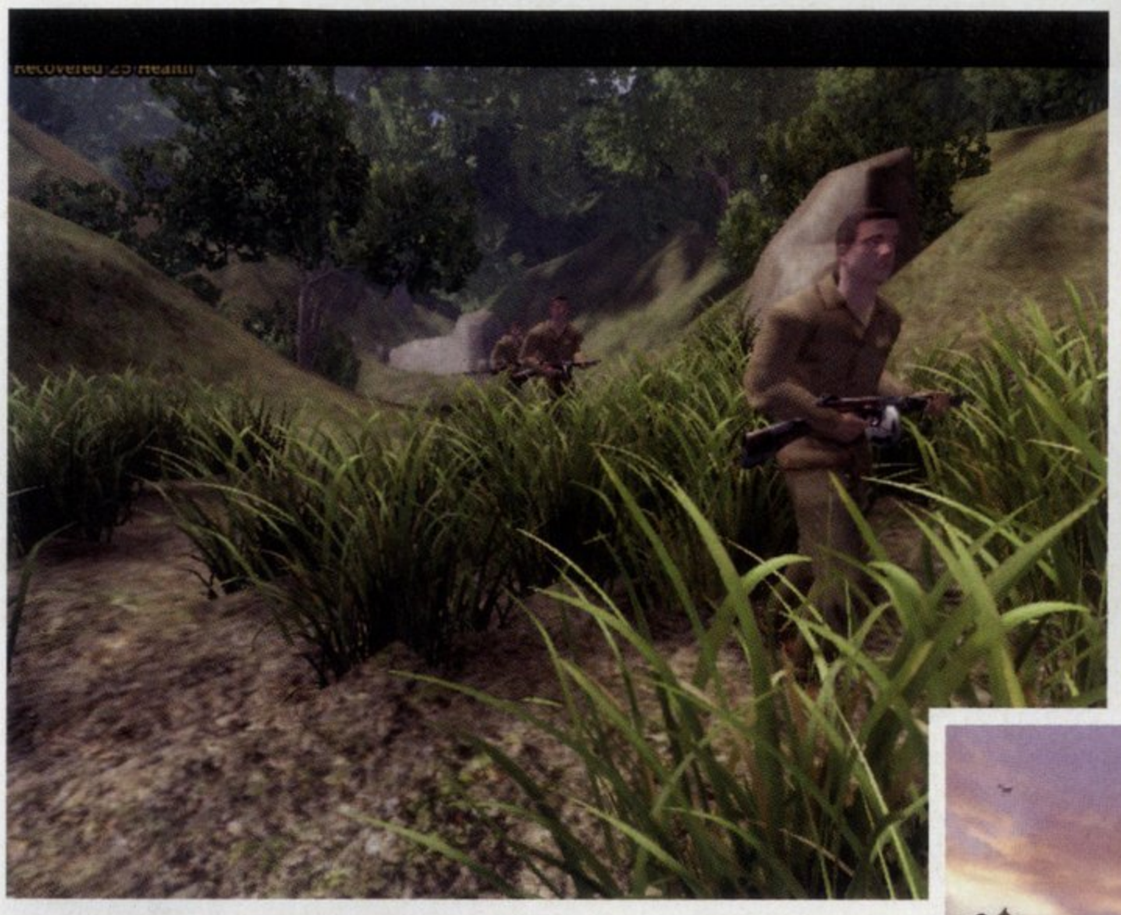
Finally GMX media have drifted into troubled waters with Oregon-based Tesseraction Games over their combat submarine title, *Enigma: Rising Tide*. The UK publishers are apparently being sued with unpaid loyalties and inaccurate sales reporting amongst their list of alleged crimes.

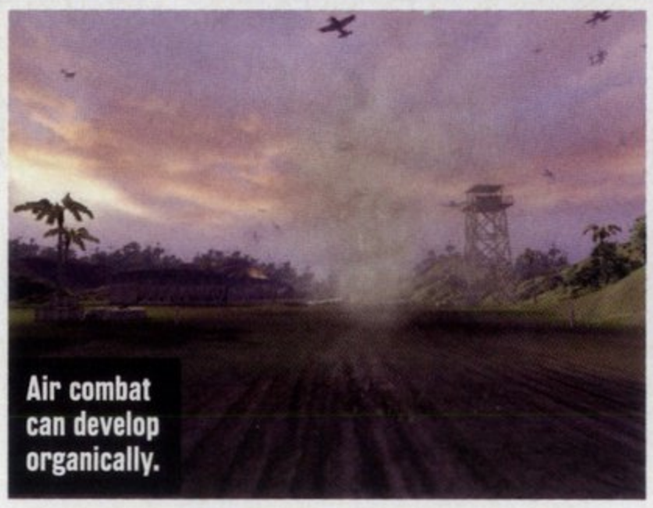
Another employee sneaks out of Ubi Soft HQ.

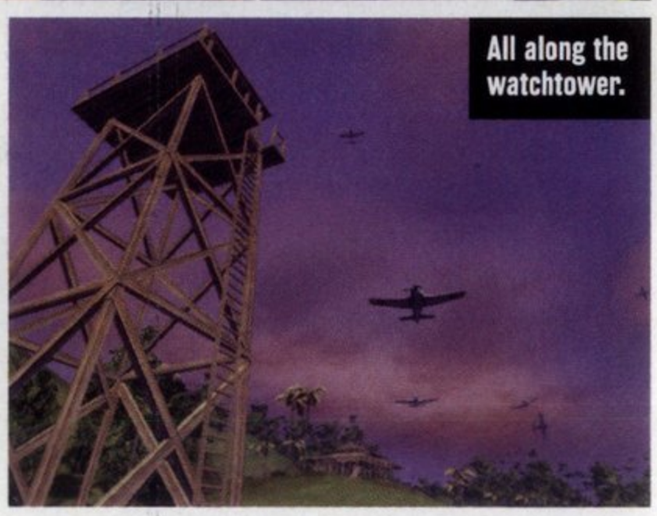
MEDAL OF HONOUR PACIFIC ASSAULT

Can it really answer the *Call of Duty*?

By TIM STONE







MOH PACIFIC ASSAULT AT A GLANCE

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Developer: EA LA

Genre: First-person action

Estimated Minimum System: PIII 600, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card

Contact: www.ea.com

Release Date: Autumn 2004

What's in it for you? Everything that made *Medal of Honour* the breakthrough title it was, with smarter AI. And jungle.

THERE are few better ways to gain an understanding of the difference in character between combat in the Pacific and combat in Europe during WWII than to read the Congressional Medal of Honour citations recorded at www.army.mil/cmh-pg/. During the month-long battle for Iwo Jima in 1945, seven of the American equivalents of the Victoria Cross were awarded to marines who selflessly smothered grenades to save comrades. Six more were given for the same act at Okinawa. At Peleliu it was five. On the western front, it's hard to find a single example of a Medal of Honour won in similar circumstances.

So were the troops making for Tokyo any braver than those making for Berlin? It seems unlikely. What this disparity illustrates instead is just how frighteningly *close* to their foes US forces frequently were during the costly island-hopping advance to Japan.

The brutal proximity was a consequence of the islands themselves – typically densely forested and barely big enough to swing a katana in – and of stubborn, well dug-in defenders that often preferred death to the disgrace of surrender. It's a grim irony that the very same ingredients that made the Pacific ground war such a uniquely terrifying and perilous experience for its participants promise to make *Medal of Honour: Pacific Assault* – an FPS rooted in that war – such an intense and distinctive experience for us gamers.

'Intense' is a word worn smooth from overuse in gaming journals, but to describe the *MoH:PA* skirmishes we witnessed on a recent visit to EA LA without recourse to it would be a court-martial offence. One particular engagement in which a squad of marines advancing through thick elephant grass stumble into an enemy ambush springs immediately to mind.

"IT BEGINS SUDDENLY, WITH THE STARTLING CRACK-CRACK-CRACK OF JAPANESE RIFLES..."

It begins suddenly with the startling crack-crack-crack of Japanese rifles and the fizz of incoming rounds. Corpsmen are hurt. Corpsmen are scrambling for the cover of boulders and dropping to the deck. Thompson sub-machineguns vent speculatively at bright muzzle flashes and targets that emerge briefly then disappear into the vegetation. Somebody is shouting for a medic. Troops respond to the point-man's hurried hand-signals. More fire and movement. An exchange of grenades, the dull detonations of which ripple the grass like raindrops landing in green tea. Two Japanese who have infiltrated the US position are cut down by extravagant bursts from a hastily deployed light machinegun. Another is felled by a shotgun blast. The attack seems to waver, the enemy to melt away. There's a lull, a sweet interlude in which nature's own symphony swells soothingly. This is cruelly cut short by the blood-curdling screams of a banzai bayonet charge and

Failing some mission tasks can have unforeseen consequences further down the line.

FLOTSAM AND FLAILING LIMBS

With the aid of a level featuring a minefield strung with barbed wire, and what could best be described as a giant pachinko machine with corpses instead of balls, Tech director Mark Dochtermann demonstrated to us some of the lovely rag-doll effects produced by the licensed Havok 2 physics engine. This capable chunk of code is also responsible for some stunning water physics.

The faces of comrades will visibly age as the campaign progresses.

The BAR rifle won't appear and the Colt pistol could be ditched for a revolver.

Bad things lurk in long grass. Careful.

the consequent chaotic clamour of no-holds-barred melee.

Look closely at the ebb-and-flow of a fight like this and you see some of the fruits of the considerable time and effort EA LA have poured into AI programming. Friends and foes that understand the crucial difference between cover and concealment and can remember the last location of a disappeared opponent are characteristic qualities of something they call 'procedural AI'. Together with morale modelling and comrades that react to player behaviour, it all helps to give fire-fights a fluid unpredictability that should massively enhance replayability. Variable morale means there's reason to single out enemy officers early in a fray, and to be wary of opponents whose backs are against the wall.

Just as striking as the level of intelligence exhibited by belligerents in *MOH:PA* is the sense of comradeship and squad identity it looks likely to foster. The men crammed beside you in the landing craft or pouring out suppressing fire while you dash up the beach are not the usual faceless fodder that accompanies the gregarious first-person shootist. A handful are men you know by name, who shared the rigours of bootcamp (the tutorial level), chose a nickname for you based on your performance there, and fought by your side through previous battles. Let them down in the field and not only will they remind you of it later, but their uncannily lifelike faces will testify with scars, missing teeth and black eyes.

While serious injuries may put them out of action for a mission or two, bosom brothers-in-arms won't – it seems – be troubled by the spectre of death during the normal course of play. For the player, of course, it's a different matter. Bandages found in strategic spots around a level will staunch the bleeding that often results from grievous wounds, but there will be no miraculous restorative med-packs. Healing is exclusively in the hands of summonable medics who are as susceptible to slugs and shrapnel as anyone else.

On the subject of slugs and their dispensers, we were naturally eager to learn which authentic arms were going to find their way into the *MOH:PA* armoury. In the words of Lead Designer and resident weaponer Dave Nash, the focus this time will be on "the really unique weapons that smaller groups continued over

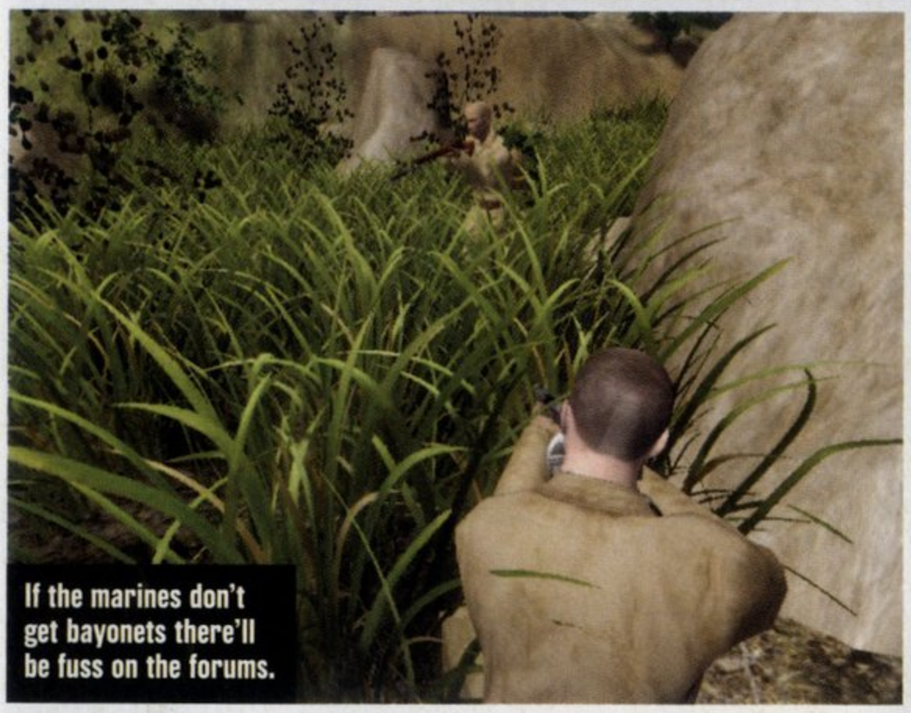
PACIFIC SPECIFICS

EA LA take their research pretty seriously. Not for them a trip down to their local library, and a few hours spent perusing WWII websites. Two jaunts to the Pacific islands to gather pictures, video and audio material, and trigger time with most of the weaponry featured in the game means *MOH:PA* looks and sounds uncommonly authentic.

"...We found an MG, shells, bones, sake bottles... it was like the war had just ended."

If you slated *Breakthrough*, think twice before accepting an invite to an EA LA staff picnic.

'Hero moments' are automatically taped for later enjoyment.



If the marines don't get bayonets there'll be fuss on the forums.

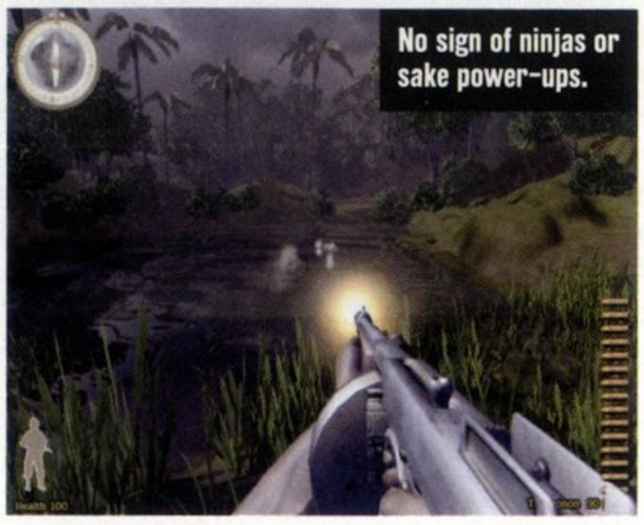
The dreaded Japanese suicide vampire bats.

FRESH FODDER

Isn't the MOH series eventually going to run out of theatres? We put the question to executive producer Rick Giolito. His answer: "WWII is a rich, rich environment not only for gameplay but also for stories. As long as we continue making compelling entertainment and pushing the envelope there's a future for the franchise. And *no*, I don't think players will get tired of particular weapon sets and theatres, simply because every five years we geta whole new set of players."

of specialised marine corps used rather than the guns we've rehashed over-and-over." An arsenal of around a dozen US firearms will include the odd old friend like the Tommy Gun with the majority being oddities like the Reising SMG and the Johnson LMG that you probably won't have wielded before. A final decision is still to be made on the inclusion of the backpack flamethrowers that proved so useful at clearing Japanese bunkers and caves but the likelihood of their presence is high. There's a bigger and more interesting question mark over bayonets for allied troops.

The atolls and archipelagos of the South Seas didn't lend themselves to tank operations but amphibious APCs like the DUKW and the Buffalo certainly earned their keep. As in *Medal of Honour: Allied Assault*, where friendly vehicles do figure there will be no chance to wrest the controls from their drivers, but on-board guns will be usable. We anticipate one of the most challenging applications of such armaments will be holing harassing Zeros. A .50 cal MG or two would definitely have been handy as we dodged strafing fighters and bouncing aircraft wreckage during a virtual tour of Henderson field (one of the critical locations in both the war and the game). Not immediately obvious at first is that dogfights like the one that was underway overhead develop organically with each plane picking and pursuing its own targets.



No sign of ninjas or sake power-ups.

Right back at the start of this article, mention was made of two of the most famous battles in the Pacific campaign – Iwo Jima and Okinawa. It may surprise you to learn that these won't be featured in *Pacific Assault*, as events in the game only span the first two years of the war. Before the planned sequel arrives covering the period 44-45, it would be logical to expect an add-on acknowledging the important contribution of Aussie troops in New Guinea. In fact, the way it looks at present, the Antipodean expansion will be for the second game which could suggest a 'Brits in Burma' supplement for the first.

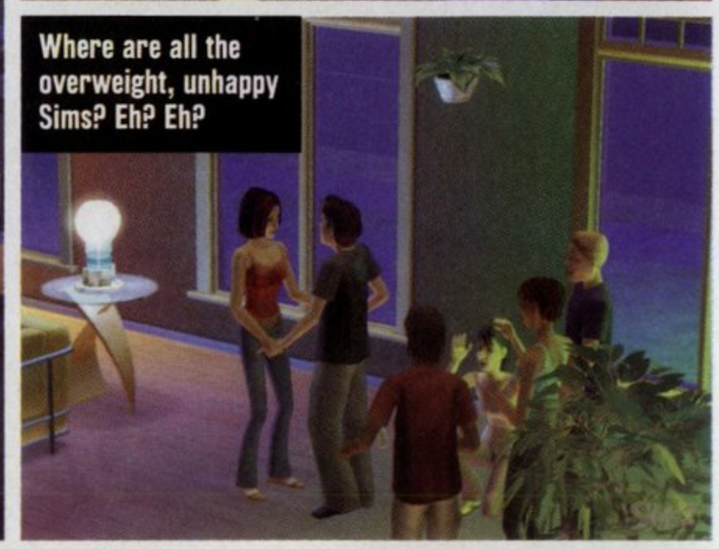
We could hardly spend a day at EA LA without bringing up the subject of the game that some are calling the true heir to *Allied Assault*. Let's close this look at one very promising WWII FPS with Senior Producer Matt Powers' response when asked if he was concerned about another very promising WWII FPS. "I'm not concerned about *Call of Duty*. I hope it's a really great game. If it is then it expands the audience for military FPSs... If it's just a knock-off of *Allied Assault* or if it's not very good then it's going to make it more difficult for us."

"LET YOUR MEN DOWN IN THE FIELD AND THEY WILL REMIND YOU OF IT LATER..."

THE SIMS 2

A ballad of bakers, bookish charm, *Black & White*, and budding romance.

By TIM STONE



THE SIMS 2 AT A GLANCE

Publisher: EA

Developer: Maxis

Genre: Management

Estimated Minimum System: PIII 500, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card

Contact: www.thesims.com

Release Date: Early 2004

What's in it for you? Cradle to grave Sim care. DNA, memories, new motives, home improvements, scores, and weekends.

IN the little town of Allegory-on-Sea there were 25 bakers. They had been locked in a bitter cake arms-race for many years, devising new recipes in the hope of one day creating a cake that would sell when cool just as well as it did when hot. When that day eventually came and the baker responsible stacked the first batch in the window, he wasn't in the least surprised when, within minutes, all 24 of his pastry-making peers bundled panting into his shop.

When we paid Will Wright, creator of *The Sims*, a visit recently, we didn't mention cake once but we did ask whether he was surprised at how few imitators his obscenely lucrative game had attracted.

"Yes, I am surprised. It's kind of hard to predict why other companies aren't doing what would seem to be the obvious thing. About a year ago I would have thought that they were all still working on them. Since then we've seen a few with a similar feel... *Ghost Master*... *Space Colony*... but none of these feel like serious competition."

As we go a little deeper, talking of the qualities like sophisticated character memories, believable mood-driven AI, and DNA, that make *The Sims 2* conceptually one of the most exciting games in production at present we seem to get close – or as close as you're ever likely to get – to an explanation of why Maxis titles have had the ballpark to themselves for so long.

"In a sense our products are what you would call technically defensible... You could do a pretty good approximation of *The Sims* without a lot of investment in technology or AI but to do something better would require significant investment... So the trick is to keep advancing our own state of the art."

Senior producer Tim LeTourneau demonstrates some of the new behavioural subtleties that will be seen in the sequel. The Olsens have a pair of teenage daughters – Zoe and Amber – and within seconds of dropping into the soap opera-cum-sitcom that is their daily life it's plain that the two girls couldn't be more different. Whether by player design, genetic accident, or the influence of life experiences Zoe has ended-up bold and clubbable while her sister is a picture of shy, bookish adolescence. The temperamental gulf is clear in body language, appearance, and behaviour.

When a quiet local lad drops by, Zoe is at his side in a flash, flirting outrageously – too outrageously it proves – as the visitor backs-off ending-up in a quiet corner with the more compatible Amber, chatting about a mutual love of chess. This chinwag blossoms, and presently Amber finds herself enjoying her very first kiss.

The really startling thing about this kind of domestic drama is the way it impacts the lives of both the key players *and* the peripheral actors, reshaping relationships, altering moods, sparking chains of gossip. This kind of emotional texture you won't have encountered before in a game.

"CONCEPTUALLY ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING GAMES IN PRODUCTION AT PRESENT."

On the subject of emotions, Will reveals that studying *Black & White* proved very useful. "Of course it's not like we're taking their game's design, but understanding the nuances and how they used the technology was very helpful."

The lesson here is plain. If you want success, be sure to eat all the cake you can get your hands on. Battenberg anyone?

UNIVERSAL COMBAT

How deep is your space?

By JIM ROSSIGNOL

Lasers, shields and spaceships. *UC* handles these all with precision.

NOTHING LIKE SEAMLESS PANTS

What made *Battlecruiser* so interesting, and yet so daunting, was the huge environment that you could roam about in, in an almost entirely freeform manner. *Universal Combat* will be recreating that feeling with a vast 3D play area, with 250 planets that can all be visited by your Battlecruiser, right down to 21,000 'areas of interest' across these dozens of celestial objects. It almost seems *too* vast and, to some people's minds, it is.

UNIVERSAL COMBAT AT A GLANCE

Publisher: DreamCatcher Games

Developer: 3000AD

Genre: Action Strategy

Estimated Minimum System: PIII 800, 128Mb RAM, 3D card

Contact: www.3000ad.com

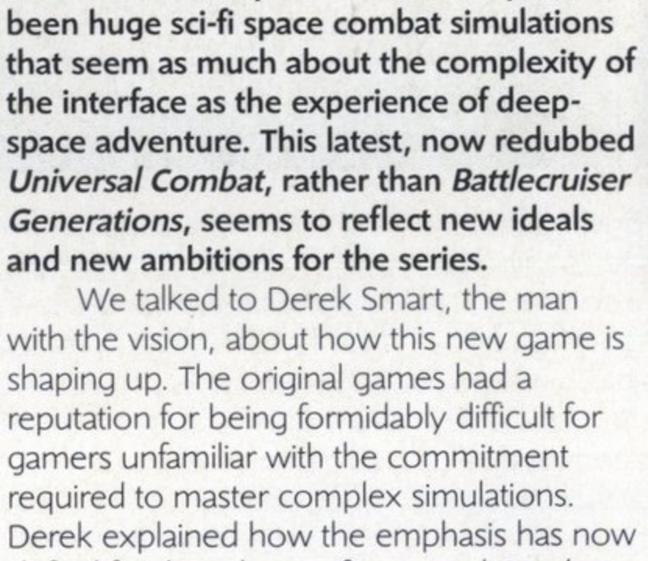
Release Date: December

What's in it for you? Vast worlds, instant action, complex controls, and some stupendously ambitious space-war scenarios.

HOW to sum up the *Battlecruiser* games? A pithy, measured analysis is required. And it's tough. Vast in scope and extremely ambitious, they have not been to everyone's tastes. They have been huge sci-fi space combat simulations that seem as much about the complexity of the interface as the experience of deep-space adventure. This latest, now redubbed *Universal Combat*, rather than *Battlecruiser Generations*, seems to reflect new ideals and new ambitions for the series.

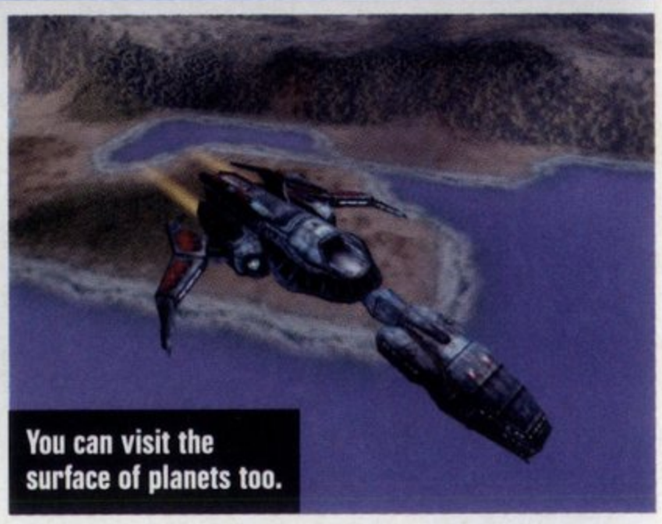
We talked to Derek Smart, the man with the vision, about how this new game is shaping up. The original games had a reputation for being formidably difficult for gamers unfamiliar with the commitment required to master complex simulations. Derek explained how the emphasis has now shifted for the release of *Universal Combat*.

"The new *Universal Combat* gamer, with no previous *Battlecruiser* experience, will have an easier time getting into the game sans the uphill climb that is characteristic of *Battlecruiser* games. I'm not saying that it's going to be braindead easy for the newbies. All I'm saying is that it is going to be easier for them to get into and get around in. Of course the extensive manual will still be there for those who want to open it and read it cover to cover."



Taking sexy screenshots becomes addictive.

Oops.



You can visit the surface of planets too.

"I'M NOT SAYING IT'S GOING TO BE BRAINDEAD EASY... I'M SAYING IT'S GOING TO BE EASIER."

Derek also described something of what we can expect from the scenarios: "*UC* has single engagement instant action scenarios as well as a campaign scenario. The former is just a series of missions of different types but which are played using different careers. The latter is a series of missions which follow a storyline. And we still have the roam scenario environment, the sandbox staple of the *BC* series. Those wanting to explore the game world and create their own adventure across a massive expanse of space and planets, can once again do so – albeit in a much more powerful and graphics-rich environment with a far more advanced AI kernel."

But the core of the series, Smart's dream, is what he calls the 'seamless electronic battlefield'. He told us just how a typical *UC* engagement might unfold: "A typical instant action scenario could have the player as a marine stationed on a carrier that is tasked with the destruction of a planetary base. The objective would be to deploy to shore using either an LCAC or attack gunship and engage the base alongside other NPC marines. Depending on how massive this engagement is, the entire scenario could involve subs for softening land targets with TLAM type missiles. Carriers deploying gunships and strike fighters for combat air support. Ground vehicles for trekking through the base and seeking out targets of opportunity. And even a carrier or cruiser in orbit around the planet, taking out base targets with OTS missiles."

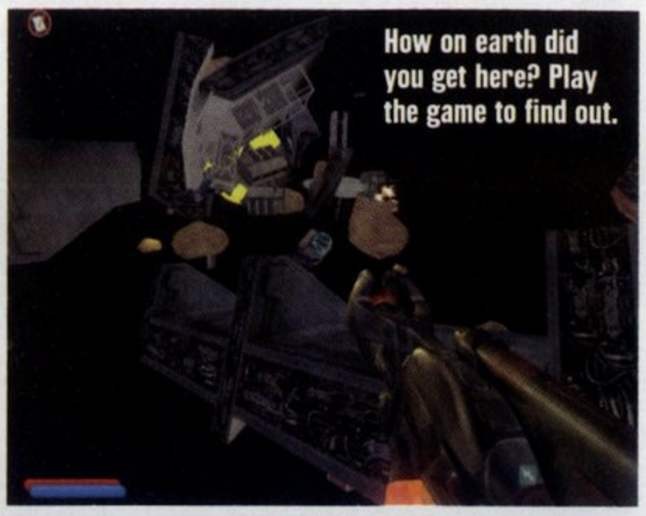
Evidently, the scope of *Universal Combat* is quite breathtaking. (Especially for those of us with an acronym fetish.) Will it take the breath of the PC Games Addict reviewer? We will find out very soon.

CONTRACT J.A.C.K.

Team-mate for your first mission: Jill. Objective: Fetch Pail of Water.

By KIERON GILLEN

While object interaction isn't central, the physics allowing objects to be scattered about in gunfights remains. Phew.



How on earth did you get here? Play the game to find out.

SIGNS OF INTELLIGENCE

Monolith have been boasting about the AI in their games. However, in their preview build, it seems that they *really* want us to appreciate what's going on. By pressing one of the Function keys when reaching for a quickload, we managed to reveal all the AI calculations and pathfinding going on behind the screens. We took it to our Pseudo-Mind Scientists who commented "Looks good to me". So there you go then.

CONTRACT J.A.C.K AT A GLANCE

Publisher: Vivendi

Developer: Monolith

Genre: First-person shooter

Estimated Minimum System: P733, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card, 2 Gb HD Space

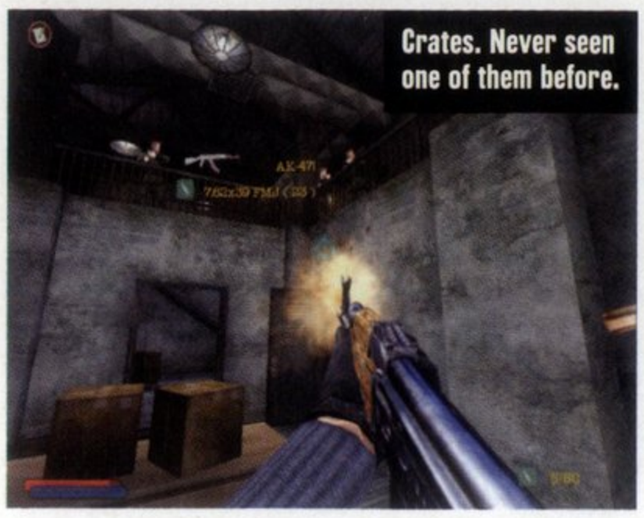
Contact: www.lith.com

Release Date: December

What's in it for you? Transgendered *No One Lives Forever* with the action and the multi-player turned up to 11.

ON the quiet, when no-one was really looking, Monolith have made themselves into the most consistently brilliant single developer of first-person games on the planet.

Now there's something that no-one would have suspected a few years ago. When the history books come to be written, this age will be started with the release of *No One Lives Forever*, which mixed high concept and low humour in a luridly coloured '60s adventure. This means that a stand-alone prequel to *NOLF*'s equally great sequel is more than welcome. It is, according to PC Games Addict's specially calculated scale, 1.78 Welcomes – in fact, rounding up to two Welcomes. Which means that getting hold of preview code for it is – er – I've lost my slide rule. Anyway, probably three to four Good Things.



Crates. Never seen one of them before.

While the protagonist has changed from the lithe Cate Archer to the sixties-shark John Jack, from the first seconds of play it's clear that some things are going to remain the same. It opens at a point towards the end of the tale and... well, that's a standard enough trick. But compare and contrast with the opening of *Max Payne*, where the hero stands solemnly on a skyscraper, a noir-monologue telling his sorry tale. *J.A.C.K.* immediately shows what different manner of game we're dealing with by opening with you floating spacesuited towards the sun, with a kitsch rocket-ship sending brightly-coloured astronauts after you. Comic and playful rather than deadly serious. It's a wonderful thing.

"BOMB-CATS, FOR EXAMPLE, SCAMPER TOWARDS A FOE WITH EXPLOSIVE CONSEQUENCES."

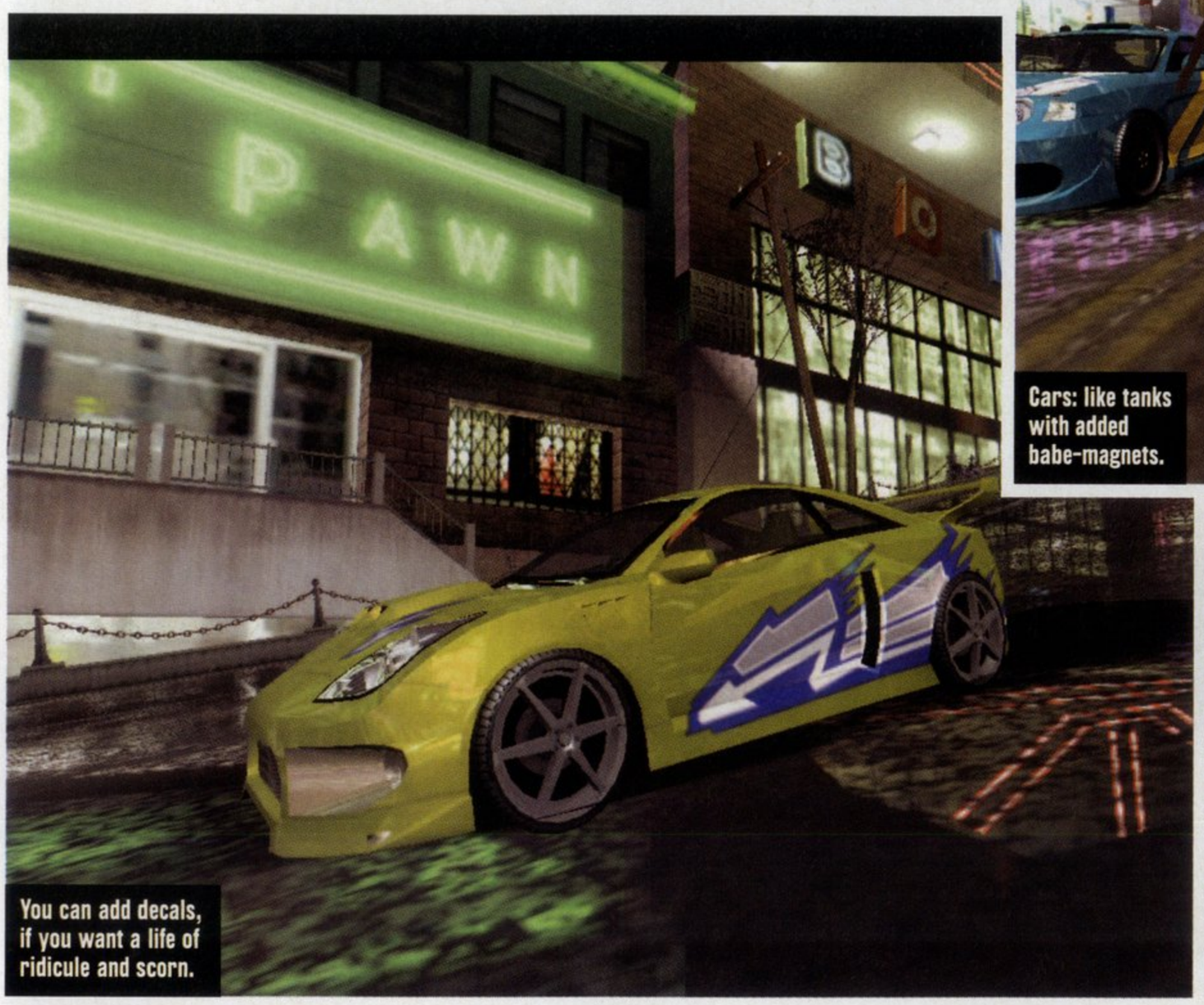
It's equally clear that a change of gender has altered the style of game. There's a real scent of testosterone in the air as the game concentrates on all-out action rather than the stealth distractions which were such a part of the *NOLF* experience. With the new Artificial Intelligence causing the opposition to improvise tactics in the arenas, this is no bad thing. Don't expect a realistic game, of course. While there's a selection of authentic weapons – AK-47's, sub-machine-guns and so on – the glorious toys of the *NOLF* series still feature. Consider the bomb-cats, for example, which wait for a foe to appear and then scamper towards them with explosive consequences. The enemy, while clever, aren't big on self-presentation. Like Bond, expect to take down entire groups with a well-timed flurry of lead.

A handful of minor reservations remain. The promised play-time of just over five hours isn't too impressive, but hopefully the price will reflect this. On a brighter side, this looks like being five hours of constant, deliberate action rather than anything less exhilarating. If it manages to keep up the pace of what we've played here, it could be a Bond-styled rampage to remember.

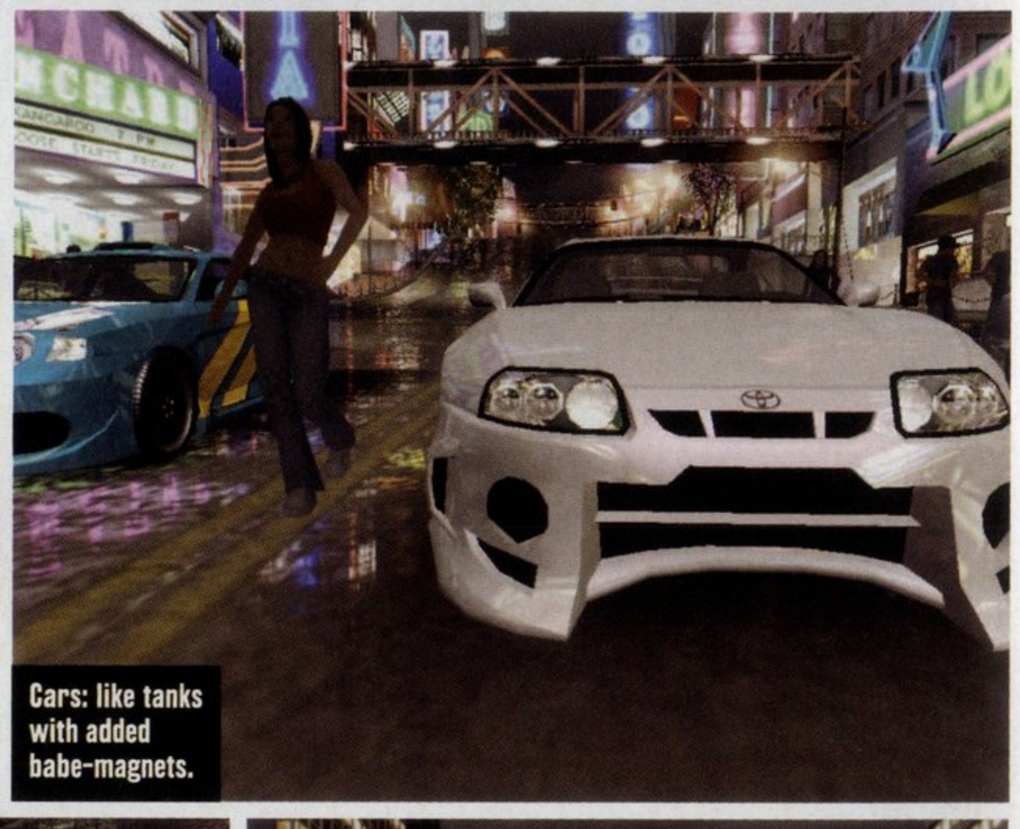
NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND

Too fast, too furious? Madness in the middle of town, at any rate.

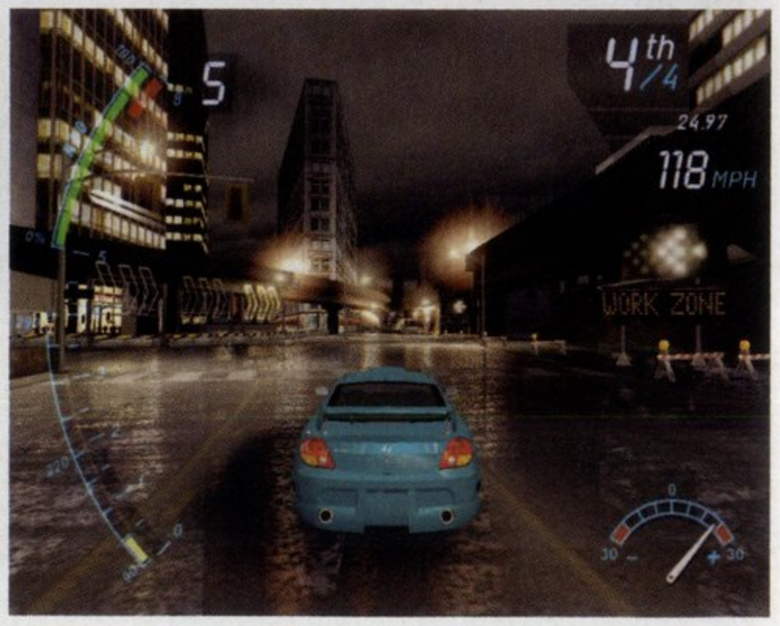
By ROSS ATHERTON



You can add decals, if you want a life of ridicule and scorn.



Cars: like tanks with added babe-magnets.



NFS: UNDERGROUND AT A GLANCE

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Developer: EA Black Box

Genre: Racing

Estimated Minimum System: 1Ghz, 256Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card

Contact: www.needforspeed.com

Release Date: December

What's in it for you? Fast cars and urban warrior thrills.

THE gaming public's well-documented desire to play realistic games is seriously misplaced. It wouldn't take too many games in which receiving one head-shot meant you could never play the game again for gamers to realise that it's a very *diluted* sense of realism that we really need. As with so many of their games, EA have smartly noted this and taken the Hollywood approach: tyres squeal, cars flip, engines blow, but no one gets hurt.

Like a number of recent films, the latest in the evergreen motoring series turns its attention to the urban adventures of fly-by-night illegal street racers. But, in a crucial move, *Underground* puts aside the Lamborghini Murcielagos and Ferrari F50s in favour of more attainable motors. And although we're not in classic Fiesta XR2i territory, the total of 20 includes the likes of the Dodge Neon, Peugot 206 and Mazda MX5 among your starting options.

By starting you out at a basic level, the real monsters of street racing will feel just that, yet they're still attainable – and we're beginning to see why Mark 'Dangerous' Donald just can't stop buying those crazy Nissan Skylines.

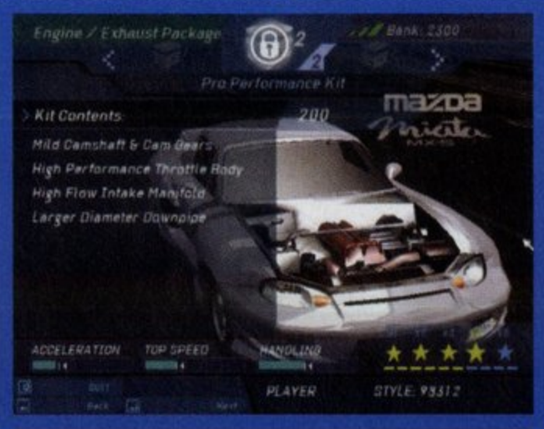
The *NFS* series has always been about unlocking new stuff to play with, but never to this extent. In order to pump up the ordinary hot hatches to street racing contenders, there are dozens of areas in which each and every car can be customised to improve performance, from engines to nitrous systems, suspension to tyres – with plenty of options in each area. Additionally, there are almost limitless ways in which to visually customise your beast: variously tinted windows, decals all over the car and even vinyl for that ultra-sheen look. Different levels of improvement are gradually unlocked, along with new motors, as you prove yourself on the *Underground* mode.

This single-player portion of the game pits you against AI madmen in a sequence of varied races around the game's city, given character and atmosphere by personal challenges being issued. All the races are held in the same giant metropolis; for each race a different start point is used, and different corners and routes are blocked off to make up the track. Often they share segments with other tracks so you'll gradually begin to learn corners and obstacles. Win races and you win cash; sweet cash to be spent on a set of Konig Blatant rims, perhaps, or a nice, pink, neon light set to glint out from beneath your extra-wide body-kit. Four types of event are featured: standard circuit races (sometimes run with an 'eliminator' feature, with the last-placed racer being kicked out after each lap), point-to-point, drag (all about perfectly timed gear-changes) and a slightly bizarre power-sliding event which is all about style points.

WOT NO FINS?

No fins, but just about every other conceivable modification and improvement is available for your car in the workshop.

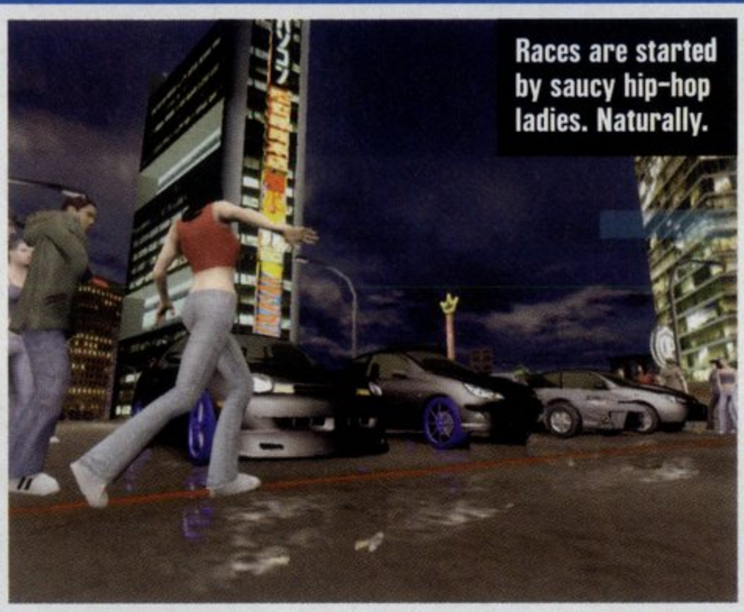
Red Bull doesn't give you wings; 800 dollars will. There's no appreciable downforce effect, but the chicks dig it.



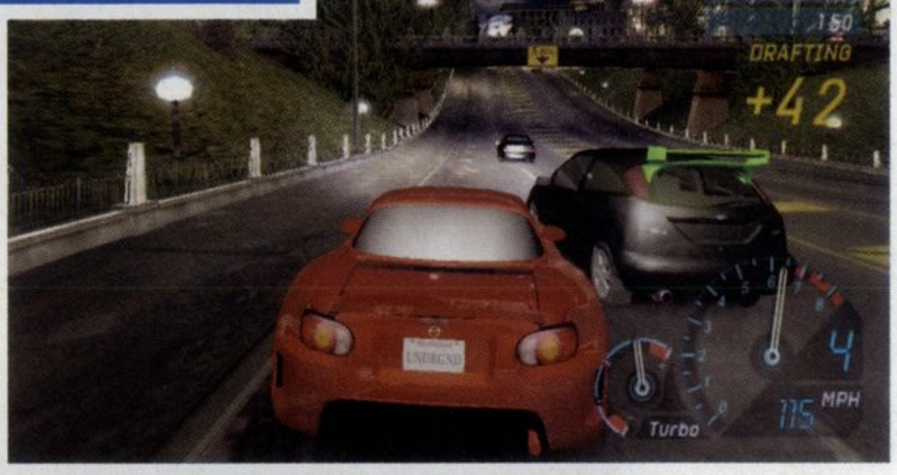
Thankfully, the tinkering doesn't go as far as camshafts and spark plugs – a complete performance kit gives you all you need.

Do people really lie awake at night worrying about the colour co-ordination of their brake calipers? Apparently.

When it comes to phallic symbols, purple is the only way for a gentleman to go.



Races are started by saucy hip-hop ladies. Naturally.



Tuck in behind another racer for a speed boost and bonus points.

The game is currently absurdly shiny. We don't know why.

Interestingly, EA have claimed that souping up your four-wheeled hog isn't just done for your own pleasure. Other racers will grant more respect to a driver with a heavily modded car, and so the prize purse presumably plumpens. We've yet to see this in effect, as the preview code we've been furiously playing is missing a few elements, but it'll be a real reason to go to town on your motor – as will the online mode, in which you'll be able to show off your artistic and mechanical endeavours to three other *Undergrounder*s while racing any of the tracks you've unlocked.

The *Need For Speed* series has, if you'll excuse the obvious statement, always been primarily concerned with one thing: speed. *Underground* doesn't disappoint, presenting a genuinely thrilling sensation of velocity when you start tearing around the streets. Unlike the beautiful, open scenery of its most recent predecessor (*Hot Pursuit 2*), which usually set you too far from the track to impart any frantic sensation of speed, *Underground*'s concrete-and-glass canyons are rarely more than a few yards from your wing-mirrors (and often rather closer). The result is a sensation of extreme speed which rarely lets up, and which is enhanced by the motion blur and even camera shake which occasionally intrude into the static view we usually take for granted.

One thing that hasn't changed is that unique *NFS* feel; a certain slickness which might be accused of distancing you from the road. It's an inevitable result of the series' strong inclination towards the 'arcade' side of the arcade/simulation axis – it'll never have the buttock-clenching will-it-grip moments regularly provided by *GP4*, *MotoGP 2* and their ilk. But *Underground*, like its predecessors, rejects the world of simulation for very good reasons: accessibility and good old-fashioned *fun*.

Granted, as Xbox gamers might have surmised, *Underground* nicks plenty of its ideas from *Project Gotham Racing* (among others), such as its style points. But the series has never been known for its originality, being content to simply focus on entertainment value. It's an approach which has worked in the past, and it looks set to work again.

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PlayStation 2

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NAUGHTY DOG

www.jak2renegade.com

fun, anyone?
PlayStation 2

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PC GAMES addict

REVIEWS

In which we put every new release to our panel of PC gaming experts.

It's A Duty Call

A true hero stands out from the ranks.

Have you ever had one of those conversations in a public place which, you suddenly realise, makes you sound like a fantasist serial killer, or at best a reader of War and Killing Monthly? You know, the ones that end with you exclaiming, "...So I leapt over the fence and stabbed the f*er in the throat..." with glittering eyes, while little old ladies decide they should take a different bus. Sometimes, you know, we need to get some *perspective*.**

Call of Duty is the kind of frighteningly intense and impressively polished kind of shooter you would expect from the folk who made *Medal of Honour: Allied Assault* and it's only Jim's minor niggles that have kept it from a truly stratospheric score.

As we predicted, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* has arrived on PC better than ever – and it was amazingly good on Xbox in the first place. At the same time, while in a *Star Wars* frenzy yet again, it's disappointing to find that *An Empire Divided* doesn't live up to expectations.

Look through the review section, though, and you'll see that there's plenty more to get your gaming saliva flowing.

ROSS ATHERTON
REVIEWS EDITOR

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THE PC GAMES ADDICT MACHINES

There's no point reviewing new games on old PCs, otherwise we wouldn't be doing them justice. After all, how can you tell how well a game runs until you've seen it on the best machine available?

That's why we've turned to Emagen. Not just because they're able to keep working with an up to date PC to put the games through their paces, but also due to the fact that we're certain that they do the best system assembly in the business. Look at the picture below and you won't find a stray ATA cable or screw out of place. If you're serious about assembling the best machine you can, you'd do well to contact Emagen.

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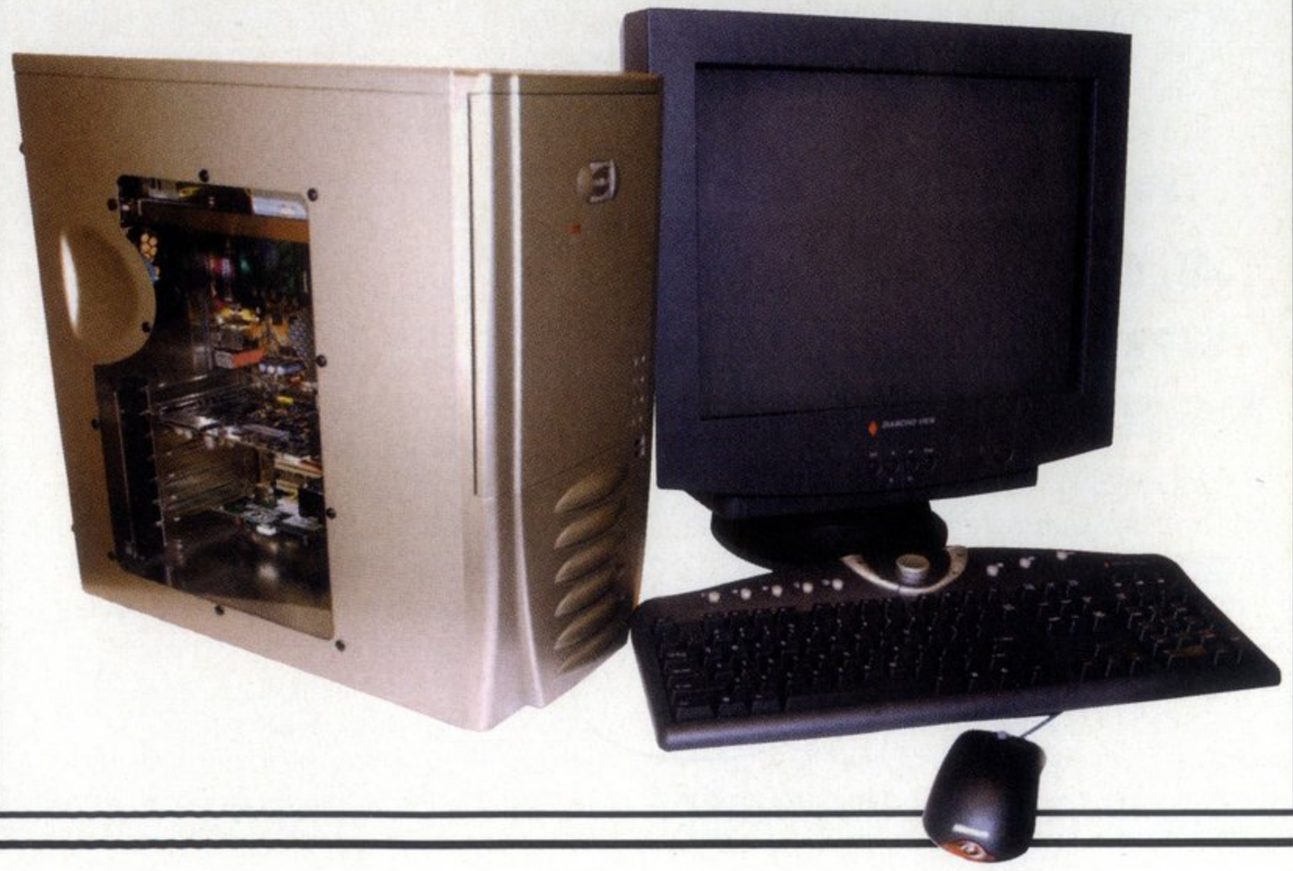

RIGHT TO REPLY

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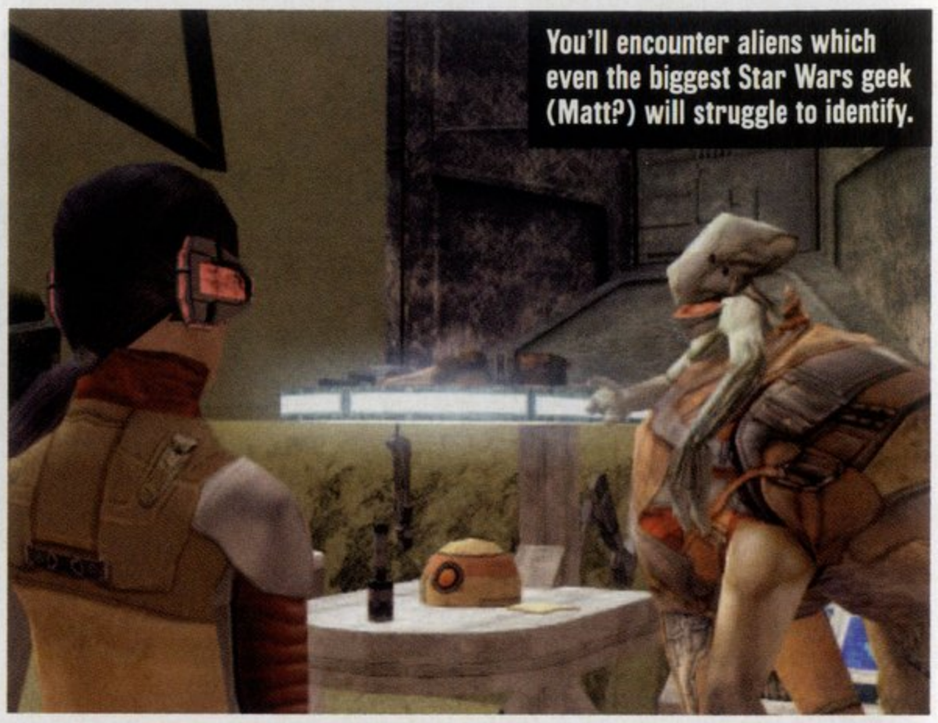
GENRE: ROLE-PLAYING

STAR WARS
KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Grandparents *are* right: things really were better back in the old days.

Those bad old Sith threaten the galaxy yet again. But will you be tempted?



You'll encounter aliens which even the biggest Star Wars geek (Matt?) will struggle to identify.

Elaborate special effects display Force powers taking hold.

PITY the role-playing game correspondent. Not only must he sport absurd moustachery; not only does it take weeks to review every game that falls to him, but he must also suffer the taunts of his contemporaries in what passes for our playground. Moreover, his attempts to expound upon the merits of favourite games usually fall on deaf ears: "Oh, I tried playing *Baldur's Gate II*, but I just couldn't get into it," moan beetle-browed shooter fans. Such a wanton lack of moral fibre would, in a better world, not pass unpunished.

However, there has been a sea change. Far from having the disastrous effects on PC gaming which many predicted, Uncle Bill's console toy, the Xbox, has brought the RPG to a new audience. More than one of PC Games Addict's regular reviewers has gleefully tucked into the Xbox iteration of Bioware's latest RPG, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, finding it remarkably easy to "get into". The cherry on my cake of vindication came when, passing me playing the PC version on a box-fresh Alienware Incredi-Beast, those men confessed that they wish they'd waited for the PC version. Quite frankly, I find their lack of faith disturbing.

Like some kind of pastry product that combines the alluring smell of mother's homemade pies, a satisfying meat-and-gravy filling *and* the scientific proof that eating said delicacy will actually make you thinner *and* more attractive to ladies/gentlemen/prospective employers, *Knights of the Old Republic* is an unprecedented combination of many good things. Bioware have called on all their expertise in plot, atmosphere, character and world creation. There is depth, but there is also accessibility. And, of course, there is Star Wars.

"It will be 4,000 years until Anakin begets Luke."

Yet this is not a Star Wars we know and love: the clue is in the title. Deep in the uncharted reaches of Lucas-lore, Bioware have created a world which is at times familiar and at times thrillingly new. In fact, the extent to which the designers have been able to invent is astonishing. Normally the Star Wars setting is tightly policed from a secret underground lair, far beneath George Lucas' remote secret base somewhere in California. But in *KotOR* it will be 4,000 years until Anakin befriends a Gungan and begets Luke, thankfully, and the galaxy is subtly different.

But Darth is still the preferred prefix of bad boys whose mummies never tucked them in at night, and the Sith are the rising force on the streets, led by renegade Jedi who have fallen to the Dark Side. The Republic – the good guys in this era – are losing in a war of attrition to the forces of Darth Malak, the balding, metal-jawed chap you've no doubt seen in the various bits of official artwork. Bastila, on the other hand, is a young Jedi with a uniquely powerful ability to swing battles in the good guys' favour. Naturally, the Sith want her guts on toast, and the game opens with her attempted assassination.

When the dust of the opening confrontation settles, you're stuck on the city-planet of Taris with few friends, limited resources and very limited abilities – it's a

MINI ADVENTURE

For a break from the usual action of running about and fighting, there are several mini-games to be found. The first is Pazaak; a simple card game similar to Blackjack played for credits; finding or buying special cards can improve your chances. Swoop racing is on offer on two planets, and again cash can be made, but it lacks any subtlety and is pretty straightforward. Finally, sometimes on your way between planets your ship will be attacked and you'll have to hop into the turret to shoot down your enemies.

YOU AND WHOSE ARMY?

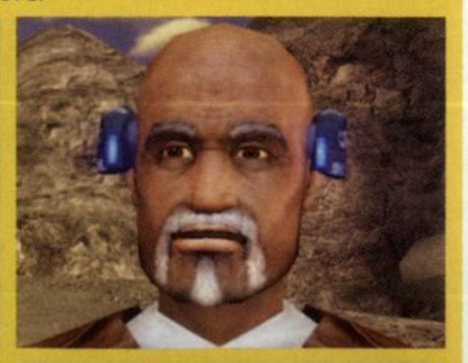
There are a potential nine characters in the game who can join you in your mission; most are plot-essential but one might be missed out entirely if you're not thorough. Each have their own background stories which are mostly worth exploring in conversation, and some have personal quests of their own which you can explore.

BASTILA Posh bird whose self-importance gets a bit much. Definite nookie potential.

CANDEROUS Woo, scary Mandalorian! Useful but unspectacular in a scrap.

CARTH Endlessly annoying, self-righteous Republic soldier. Handy with pistols, though.

HK-47 C3PO's sadistic, mass-murdering cousin. Savour his tales of death and meatbags.



JOLEE Chirpy OAP Jedi who's worth getting on board for his comprehensive Force powers.

JUHANI This mopey cat-woman is fair in a fight but has a truly ridiculous Russian accent.

MISSION Puny, largely useless, whiny-voiced Twi'lek. You'll end up wanting to kill her.

T3-M4 No, *not* R2-D2. Not much for conversation, but handy with computers. Can't make tea.

ZALBAAR The strong, silent type. Give him a pair of swords and watch him dice your foes.

LUCY SKYWALKER See what I did there? Yes, I'm playing as a girl this time, and I am very hot.

Brr! State effects like this are only ever temporary, thankfully.

Quickly select powers and special attacks with the three red icons.

Forceful

classic Bioware opening, but dressed in the dramatic robes of Star Wars. Tasked with finding the missing Jedi, you poke around town and ask a few questions in a manner which will be familiar to most. Delicately, the plot unravels, a piece at a time: too many RPGs thrust names, places and events at you in a torrent of information you can't hope to remember. Not here. Brilliantly, you're only told what you need to know at the time, so you can get on with romping through the game and enjoying the sights without worrying about brainache.

Also in true Bioware style, you start off alone and gradually build up a party of willing co-adventurers. At first it's just Carth (see 'You And Whose Army?') but after a few hours there'll be more than three of you – and that is where the three-person limit comes in. In addition to your main character (who must always be 'active'), you can have two sidekicks at any one time (although you can have just one, or even none, if you dare). The remainder of your party hang about at your safe-house or later on your docked ship while the chosen ones get on with the job. But those back at the ship receive experience points even when they're lounging about, playing space-chess with the Wookiee. Crucially, you can swap out team members when you're away from the ship just by selecting them in the menu; provided you're in a 'safe' area. 'Unsafe' areas can be roughly classed as dungeons – essentially, a zone too dangerous for the characters being subbed to theoretically shuttle between the party location and the dock by themselves. It takes a little imagination, but ultimately it's a system that works very well.

Eventually, you're likely to settle on at least one favourite character who'll accompany you much of the time; either for handy Jedi powers, combat ability or the level of their special skills such as computer hacking, electronic lock-picking or defusing mines. Having said all that, *Knights* generally eschews the non-combat skills in favour of fighting – there's always the alternative of battling straight through a problem, and it always seems the easiest route to take. It's a minor criticism which won't trouble anyone who favours a hack-and-slash approach; but fans of a stealthy *Deus Ex* approach to role-playing will find that path less rewarding.

And while we're unleashing a few bolts of Force Minor Criticism, the ability continued over

ARE WE NEARLY THERE YET?

Once you've secured a ship for your gang, it's time to head off into the galactic emptiness. Or, rather, the selection of planets below. Note, however, that these are not the only places you'll visit on your quest to hunt down the naughty Darth Malak. I don't want to give too much away, so there are no spoilers about anything beyond these six planets.

TARIS Your first port of call is dominated by a sprawling mega-city, under which festers a dangerous underworld.

DANTOOINE A lush planet where the sun shines and the beasties attack. Temporary home of the meddling Jedi.

TATOOINE Nope, never heard of it. Stuffed with Jawas and Sand People, apparently. Do they live in Sand Castles?

MANAAN A watery world inhabited by an impartial fish-folk. Kind of them to build a nice dry space-port, then.

KASHYYYK Home of the Wookiees, those clothes-shunning walking carpet people. Hey – better than the Ewoks, right?

KORRIBAN A dry, dusty world of strange ruins and home to a Sith academy. The ideal place to test your evilness.

EXTRA, EXTRA

Bioware claim the PC version was always in parallel development alongside the Xbox game. It shows, too: proper PC resolutions. Proper PC visual options. A completely different interface. Proper PC controls, using the mouse effectively and with keyboard shortcuts for most actions. A completely new space station near Yavin containing a merchant with unique items for sale. And many more different faces on character's faces than the Xbox version.

to travel to a number of planets rather implies that you'll have considerable freedom when your feet touch down. Yet, although the action is hardly linear and there are plenty of optional encounters and quests, the actual gaming real estate can seem small and therefore limited. This is most noticeable on Tatooine; the explorable areas of desert are limited by marker posts and straying beyond these bounces you back with the message that it's not safe to travel beyond that point. The game's limits are handled reasonably well, but the moderate scale of the environments, compared to the sprawling landscapes of a massively multi-player game, sometimes feels a bit artifical.

It's fortunate that the controls are excellent, as you spend most of your time exploring and choreographing combat. You're able to switch between any of the three characters at will, taking complete control of their abilities and equipment, while the remaining two follow AI scripts. Importantly, combat is not a game state you can enter at will, meaning you can't – as you can in many RPGs – massacre villagers if the game doesn't want you to. Every interactive item or sentient being in the environment can be selected on a cyclable basis. Clicking on that item or person activates the default action for that item: open (a container or door), talk to (a non-hostile) or attack (a hostile). In the latter case, the target reticle also includes tiny scrollable windows which display possible special attacks, grenades to throw and Force powers.

Sounds complicated? It must have been to design. But in practice this interface allows the RPG virgin to gradually use all the items and powers at their disposal without having to rummage through inscrutable menu screens to activate something before every use. It's one of this game's master strokes. Moreover, if something *looks* like a decent weapon for the character in question, it probably is.

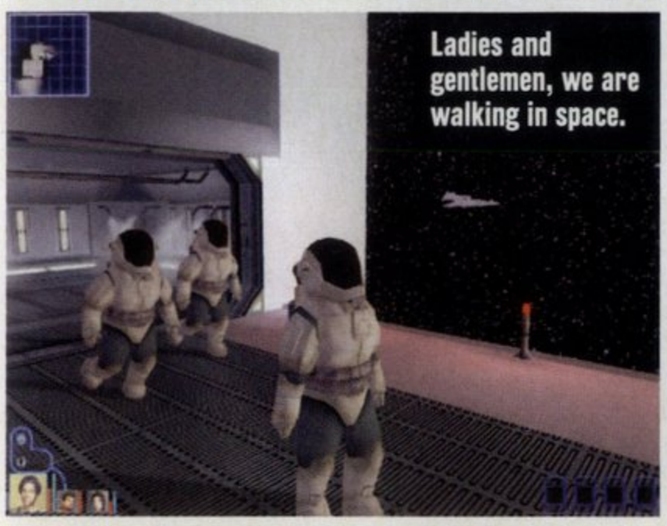
"Locations drip with fitting details."

Happily, there's plenty for us RPG fans to tinker with too. Characters have statistics and gain levels and abilities in a system derived from D&D – a dozen skills (security, computer use) and several dozen feats (dual-wielding, flurry attack) are there, alongside Force powers for the gifted characters. On top of this, hundreds of items – weapons, armour, implants, space-potions and so forth – can be found and will, unfortunately, eventually clog up the rather basic inventory management system. That said, an excellent 'equip' screen lets you view and compare weapons and suchlike much more easily.

It's remarkably unusual for me, upon thankfully shambling into the local bar on a Friday night for a trough or two of tasty beer, to be accosted by plaintive locals requiring assistance with kidnapped offspring, rat infestations or mislaid family heirlooms. Let's face it: it just doesn't happen; it never happened in Ye Olde Dayes and it shouldn't happen in any of these made-up worlds we so love to play around in. Yet it's a fall-back device in countless games, a way of introducing sub-quests, characters and local colour, and a means of padding out the story. So, if you've ever pointed accusingly at your monitor when your level 12 half-orc is asked to locate lost jewellery, chanting "that's not realistic", you won't be impressed with the way *Knights* sticks to genre staples.

Granted, there are some entertaining twists on the formulae – the missing 'personal assistance' droid on Dantooine is a favourite – but for the most part the sub-quests and even much of the main plot is played out according to familiar techniques, even to the extent that there are knowing, winking references in several conversations. Even the standard structure of the game, in terms of the way it is broken down into locations, main quest objectives and optional side-quests, is transparent if you put your mind to seeking out the game's seams and stitches. But what kind of petty fool would carefully listen to a performance of Beethoven, keeping an ear out for an

COMBAT MODE ENGAGED. PRESS THE DISENGAGE BUTT CANCEL.
Cryoban grenades inflict cold damage over a wide area. And clash with yellow.
ROGUE ASSASSIN DROID
DISENGAGE



COMBAT MODE ENGAGED. PRESS THE DISENGAGE BUTTON TO CANCEL.
WOOKIE GUARD
Jolee (right) unleashes his baddest Force powers.
DISENGAGE

FORCING THE ISSUE

It's no spoiler to say that, after a point, your character will acquire Force powers. Which ones, though, are up to you; you can't have them all as they're selected one by one as you level up. Most have several levels, with the ultimate upgraded version often being devastating, and well worth working towards.

Whirlwind picks up a hapless opponent and spins them round, causing damage.

Lightning, as seen blasting from the wrinkly fingertips of Emperor Palpatine.

Sweet Drain Life. Simply reach out and take your enemy's health, adding it to yours.

Stasis is a handy trick that buys time and gives you a free hit or two.

errant bassoon? What manner of deviant watches DVDs with the director's commentary on? Yes, the game is an artificial creation. Get over it, and immerse yourself.

And so we come to the true worth of *Knights of the Old Republic*: its presentation. Not just its graphics (excellent) or sound (also excellent) – I mean the way the game is *presented*. It is authentic; its locations drip with fitting details, from planet-specific architecture, flora and fauna to alien species' appearance, animation and voices. The environments, even if they aren't actually as big as you expect, mostly *feel* expansive.

Moreover, the story is presented with the same quality and attention to detail. Cinematic conversational cut-scenes convey all the game's interactions, from inconsequential encounters, side-quests and merchant transactions to key plot events. Incredibly, almost every line of dialogue in the game is voice-acted – and there are literally hundreds of characters spread across its planets and off-world locations. It's an incredible feat of development that explains the four-Gigabyte installation; but in addition to this quantity, you'll struggle to find a game that is as well – and consistently well – voice-acted as this. Even aliens are fully voiced in their native tongue, with a translation appearing in the subtitles, although the lines are limited in number and can noticeably repeat during a long conversation with a Rodian or Twi'Lek.

The nature of character, personality, choice and the divide between good and evil are standard RPG tropes which are just as central to *Knights of the Old Republic* as any other decent RPG. But few other games – perhaps *Planescape: Torment* – have explored them so thoroughly, drawn you so far in *and* given you such extreme choices. The fact that one or two of my party members annoy me deeply is, I feel, a good sign. I dislike them because their personalities are irritating or preachy, or because they're rubbish at fighting. Not because they're two-dimensional paper-dolls, or just sacks of hit-points.

The choices that must be made, particularly towards the end of the game, are sometimes hard to make. At other times, you can't see yourself taking the greedy, cruel or sadistic option. Let me give you an example. I've played the game through once making what might be deemed to be 'good' choices. On my second time through I've forced myself into the shoes of a devious, aggressive, awkward, materialistic person, the better to see how the experience differs. At one point on this second game I continued over

THESE AREN'T THE DROIDS YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

The classic Jedi mind trick is fully represented by Force Persuade. It gives you extra dialogue options: depending on the susceptibility of the person in question, you might get what you're after. So, for example, you'll struggle to get a notoriously hard-minded Hutt to cough up more cash, but a petty docking attendant might be more easily 'persuaded' to waive the landing fee.

"Join the dark side, Luke!"

SYSTEM MISER

How *Knights* will play on *your* PC

- Supported resolutions: **800x600, 1024x768, 1280x960, 1600x1200**
- Scaleable options: **Shadows, grass, texture quality, anti-aliasing, anisotropy, frame buffer effects, soft shadows, V-sync**

VERDICT: **T&L is required, ruling out anything below a GeForce 2. 1GHz clock speed and 128Mb RAM are *just* enough, but don't expect it to look better than the Xbox with a playable frame rate. The high-res texture pack, anti-aliasing and soft shadows really do make a difference, so the recommended spec plus at least a GeForce FX or Radeon 9700 is preferable.**

Fear ancient holograms.

Twi-Leks are dreadfully common.

Your ship's navigation computer is programmed with destinations.

was faced with a stark choice; the 'evil' route's outcome being quite dramatic. Get this: having made that 'evil' decision, I felt a dreadful pang of guilt and had to reload a saved game. I just couldn't go through with it. Either I'm getting soft in my old age, or this game poses some questions that genuinely make you consider your actions.

RPGs usually offer stark choices between good and evil. Fair enough. But subtly, *Knights* often presents morally ambiguous or very complex situations. Is it better to let someone die so their family can live in ignorant bliss? When is it immoral to accept reward? Is it wrong to use Force powers for financial gain? Often the only judge is yourself or your companions. Though the ultimate gauge of your personality and decisions is a meter that ranges between the Light and Dark sides for each character you control. The NPCs' ratings do not change, as they don't make party decisions, but yours certainly does, depending on your course of action at certain times. One consequence of an extreme rating is that corresponding powers cost fewer Force points (think mana points) Heal is cheaper if you're a goodie, Kill is cheaper if you're a baddie.

"I can confidently recommend it to anyone."

But it's not the only consequence. Conversations will take your Force alignment into account. Your Jedi superiors and contemporaries will occasionally note alignment shifts and express approval or otherwise. It's very subtle, but a reminder of how *coherent* the whole experience is.

As such, minor niggles remain just that: minor. On reflection, several characters become redundant in the latter half of the game as their weak Force ability renders them obsolete. Hand-to-hand far outweighs ranged combat – probably a factor of the game's D&D roots. Many skills also become irrelevant – it's quicker to bash open a crate or door than slowly pick its lock. On a more significant level, *Knights* is certainly the easiest RPG I've ever played despite the slider to ramp up combat difficulty; even when it comes to quests there are always multiple solutions. Granted, this means there's very little spell-breaking frustration involved, but you'll occasionally feel your gaming skills aren't being sternly challenged.

But neither this, nor the above-mentioned lapses into stereotype, can spoil an experience of remarkable depth that so successfully combines its references. It's the first RPG I can confidently recommend to any gamer, be they goblin-fancier or shootist. Try it. You might surprise yourself.

ROSS ATHERTON

PCGA PROFILE

Knights of the Old Republic is:
- **Excellently plotted**
- **The best Star Wars game since *Jedi Knight***
- **The best RPG of the year**

Knights of the Old Republic is not:
- **Just for RPG fans**
- **Just for Star Wars fans**
- **Just an Xbox conversion**

■ Publisher **Activision/LucasArts** ■ Developer **Bioware** ■ Minimum System **PIII 1GHz, 128Mb RAM, 4Gb HD space, 32Mb T&L 3D card** ■ Recommended **P4 1.6GHz, 512Mb RAM, GeForce 4 or better** ■ Multi-Player **None** ■ Web Address **www.bioware.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

PC GAMES addict
More polish than Vader's helmet, more charisma than Han Solo. Get it now.
92%

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Jedi Knight
This superior FPS is dated but its design quality shines through.

Planescape: Torment
Fabulously written and daring RPG that will never go out of fashion round here.

THE 2004 ANNUAL

Mixed by Mark Dynamix and John Course

Featuring

Benny Benassi	Groove Armada	Ferry Corsten
Linus Loves	Cam Farrar	Rogue Traders
Planet Funk	Bad Cabbage	The Supermen Lovers
Room 5	Lee Cabrera	Deepest Blue
+ So Much Love To Give		**www.ministryofsound.com.au**

2 x CD out now

GENRE: MMORPG

STAR WARS GALAXIES AN EMPIRE DIVIDED

The thousand year wait is over, but the dream is still far, far away.

Target: Ticket Collector
Hecatus
(Master Marksman)
Ticket Collector
Spatial Combat GroupChat
"I wish you didn't have to leave. Goodbye."
Laegotelle Zifaac (an agriculturalist) says,
Grizzlefist says, "N I guess...cahnge things up"
Shyriiwook.
The next shuttle will be ready to board in 8 seconds.
The next shuttle is about to begin boarding.
Spatial

Travel between planets starts at City Starports with transports leaving every ten minutes.

Take in some live music and dance to rest your battle weary mind.

The character customisation tools allow major tweaking of each of the eight player races.

FACTION MEN

The Rebel Vs Empire Galactic Civil War rages through the game although its implementation is critically flawed. Each character begins as a neutral but can align with either faction by approaching the relevant recruiter in town and carrying out some simple tasks to win faction points. Players can then choose to become 'Overt' so they can wade into conflict with players in the opposing faction. On the US servers the Rebel faction vastly outweighed the Empire and attempts at creating controlled PvP battlegrounds have failed.

THE problem with potential is that it can be difficult to live up to. Luke had bags of it, and while it would have been fun to carry on taking trips to and from the Toshi station and bull's-eyeing womp rats at the weekend, he set his sights higher. He had a galaxy to save. Our hopes for *Star Wars Galaxies* were similarly lofty. This was to be an MMORPG from the makers of *Everquest*, armed with the most commercially viable licence in games. Our expectations were, as Charles Dickens might say, great.

Unfortunately, to remorselessly extend our Skywalker analogy, we find *Star Wars Galaxies* stumbling around, blast shield down, waving its lightsaber hopefully; still a hyperspace jump from fulfiling its potential.

Now that *Galaxies* has finally arrived in Australia, after a painful wait, you'd think it would be perfect by now. After all, the American guinea pigs have had three months to iron it out for us. But while many of the original bugs and imbalances have been fixed, Sony Online Entertainment's (SOE) relentless quest to continually add new features has caused more problems, and left the neglected bugs to pile up.

The effort to provide value for money for 70% of *Galaxies'* players has blighted the experience for the rest, leaving them with professions cursed by imbalances and bugged tools. While this minority will eventually cancel their subscriptions, SOE hope the majority will stay on for the monthly content, however half-baked it appears. Bugs vs new content is a conundrum for the genre as a whole but in *Galaxies* case, the issues are magnified by its scale, audience and expectations.

Galaxies' ambition lies at the core of its problems. For a start, the learning curve for newbies is incredibly steep. Despite a tutorial and an excellent customisable interface you will spend your first few days lost and in need of direction. Your choice of path from six starting professions is a major part of your initial involvement and with 26 elite professions to explore, the options are bewildering, with little guidance available.

"*Galaxies'* ambition lies at the core of its problems"

Brawler, Marksman and Scout offer a combat route, the Artisan leads a life of crafting, or you can choose to support your local community by becoming a Medic or Entertainer. Each of these basic roles has four branches of four levels to attain before a profession can be mastered, and you spend skill points to reach each level. High flying types can then aim for promotion to the elite classes. Artisans for example can choose to become Weaponsmiths, Armoursmiths or Architects, each with their own advancement tree. You're not limited by your early choices, chosen race or attributes and are free to explore as many starting professions as you wish until you find the path that suits. You can also change direction at any time simply by surrendering levels to regain skill points. It amounts to a grandiose character development scheme, but it's got problems.

Your experience with *Galaxies* will be different depending on the avenue you explore. As an Artisan and then Architect my path was relatively bug free, with few imbalances to prevent me from revelling in a comprehensive crafting system.

With little or no loot to be gained from slain foes, all items have to be crafted by players. Each item is made up from a blueprint of resources that have to be

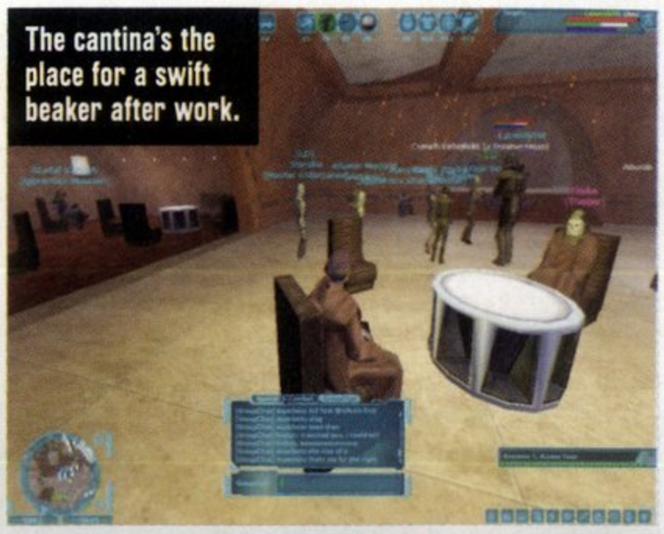
SORRY ABOUT THE MESS

Forget the hokey religions, all you really need in this galaxy is a good blaster at your side and no end of aggro can be yours.

Mission terminals hand out Destroy tasks that are suitable for a small party or a hardened combat character.

Creatures spawn around the cities and hunting on planets like Dathomir offer big XP awards to high level Scouts.

Become an overt member of the Rebels or Empire (see Faction Men) and you can wage war on rival players.



The cantina's the place for a swift beaker after work.

Leg it!

Butterfly collecting *SWG* style.

Forceless

collected from the land and then fashioned using a tool and/or a crafting terminal in the city. Items are then sold on Bazaar terminals or Vendors in Merchant's homes (Merchant is an elite profession derived from Artisan). The whole economy is player driven and is therefore volatile and open to exploitation. Nevertheless, profits can be made by a dedicated Architect able to craft homes, furniture and harvesters (large automated resource collectors).

Inevitably there's a "But..." Two major ones, in fact. SOE constantly switch the location of resources across the ten planets, meaning that Artisans have to regularly log in to re-locate harvesters in order to get the most from the power and money they eat up. Secondly, because *Galaxies* offers little for low-level characters, the temptation to 'grind out' XP points by continually crafting the same object in order to bypass early levels proves irresistible. Ultimately, crafting professions begin to feel like real-life jobs, offering little time to spare for the frivolities of Kaadu hunting or a swift beaker down the cantina. Where did the fun go?

"Crafting professions feel like real-life jobs"

It gets worse. For some crafters all the graft counts for nothing. Droid Engineer is another elite Artisan profession and just one area of the game that has been cruelly neglected by SOE. Threepio and R2 may be central to Lucas' vision but droids are almost totally redundant in *SWG*. Minor combat, healing and crafting abilities are the sum of their abilities, but compared to the hulking elaborate beasts that can be purchased from Creature Handlers, they're scrap. It's a major imbalance and it's been that way for months.

Galaxies' combat is another disappointment (see 'Sorry About The Mess'). As usual, you click on an enemy to engage fisticuffs, but then your only role is to add special moves that can be queued throughout the battle. Much of the action is Player vs Environment, which is a worthy idea aimed at encouraging grouping, but still a major frustration for the solo warrior.

The scope for Player vs Player combat is huge, but the vision of large-scale firefights between Rebels and Imperials never really materialises. The main problem on the US servers has been that Rebel forces outnumber the Empire by 60% so the Civil War being encouraged by SOE is effectively a non-starter.

continued over

A NEW HOPE?

SOE are preparing player mounts for speedy travel around *SWG*'s planets while player cities will be introduced with the same free update. Players can create their own urban areas complete with facilities such as shuttleports and medical centres all governed by the new Politician profession. Even more exciting is 'Space' the first full retail expansion that will add the new space zone, player ships and those X-Wing Vs Tie Fighter battles we long for.

You receive 8 points of Combat experience.
You now qualify for the skills Ranged Support 1: Aim & Threaten
You kneel.
You stand up.
You harvested 1 unit(s) of Corellian Scaley Hide. The creature was of medium size.
You receive 5 points of Scouting experience.
Spatial
Combat
GroupChat
You're going to need a bigger net.

SYSTEM MISER

How *Star Wars Galaxies* will play on *your* PC

■ Supported resolutions: **800x600 to 1600x1200** ■ Scaleable options: **World detail bias, Level of detail scales for static objects, characters, particle system, shadows, terrain, water and more**

VERDICT: **It's a harsh taskmaster that will stretch every silicon sinew of your PC. At the min spec you'll struggle although the number of scalable options enable you to tailor the graphics engine to your PC's capabilities. Even on our uber 3.2 rig, *SWG* struggled at the highest graphical settings. If you can scale things up though you'll be playing the most beautiful of MMORPGs.**

Magic *SWG* moment number 11. Taking shelter under a beast of burden at Moenia's Starport.

Slashing down in Corellia. You've a right to look miserable.

Not while on duty surely?

Magic *SWG* moment number 12. Duelling outside Anchorhead.

PCGA PROFILE

Star Wars Galaxies is:
- **Massive**
- **Beautiful**
- **Just the beginning**

Star Wars Galaxies is not:
- **All that we hoped for**
- **Bug free**
- **A Jedi's playground**

PvP has some major issues too. One shot kills are the main bugbear as the harshness quickly kyboshes the fun of challenging fellow players to duels while waiting for the shuttle to arrive.

SOE responded with zoned PvP battlegrounds. They're combating the repetitive missions by enabling factioned players (see 'Faction Men') to play a role in the evolution of a *SWG* plotline. The first two chapters have already appeared on US servers but show a distinct lack of imagination – charging players with item retrieval and minor combat missions.

Unfortunately this 'storyline' is being ignored as everyone scrambles for Jedi Knighthood. But again SOE have struggled to keep up with player demand. When it became clear that no one knew how to beome a Jedi, SOE introduced holocrons. These items instruct players about the professions they must pursue in order to unlock their latent Force powers. But even though the first Jedi are now appearing in the US, the community remains confused about how to join this mystical group and whether it's worth the trouble.

Currently, *Galaxies* is Star Wars riven by Jedi controversy; without Tie Fighters and Landspeeders; where crafting becomes laborious and the Galactic Civil War remains hopelessly one-sided. It's the kind of stuff that even George would have to leave on the cutting room floor. Why then should this warrant your attention? Potential...

For 100 days and nights I've been foraging for resources, crafting items and flogging my wares in bazaars and from my own humble digs on Tatooine. It's occupied my time and my thoughts and through all the frustrations, I've still gone back. Why? Because I've sampled the real promise flowing through *SWG* like midichlorians through Anakin's veins. In many respects *SWG* is a case study in what's wrong with the MMORPG genre but at the same time it has the potential to be the biggest and best of them all. Every Star Wars enthusiast should experience this game. It's just that today might not be the best day to start.

MARK SUTHERNS

■ Publisher **Activision** ■ Developer **Sony Online Entertainment** ■ Minimum System **P3 933, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card** ■ Recommended **P4 1.5, 512 RAM, 64Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **Internet**
■ Web Address **www.starwarsgalaxies.station.sony.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Anarchy Online Shadowlands
Superlative expansion pack sci-fi massively multiplayer online RPG.

Eve: Second Genesis
Utterly compelling starship MMOG. Due a major update very soon.

PC GAMES addict
Puts ambition before execution, but promises to go beyond the stars.

72%

GENRE: MANAGEMENT

THE SIMS MAKIN' MAGIC

Teaching our Sims how to spell, and our kids how to mis-spell. Thanks, Maxis.

Replace miserable gardeners with freakish living gnomes.

Kids! Embrace Satan! Jesus is weak and the Bible is full of lies!

Reliving the dinner party scene from Beetlejuice...

GET YOUR WARLOCKS OFF

It does *try* to do new things, even if they're unsettlingly cheesy. Take the magic duels – spell-casting face-offs against NPC Sims, and the only way to win the Magicoins (nnnng) you need to buy spell ingredients with. They're an opportunity for some amusing animations, but quickly stale.

PCGA PROFILE

Makin' Magic is:

- **The last *Sims 1* expansion. Hah.**
- **Trite and cynical.**
- **Ambitious, in all the wrong ways.**

Makin' Magic is not:

- **Grammatically correct.**
- **Entertainingly quirky.**
- **For *The Sims'* Christian fans.**

Scientific

THE following tale is entirely fictitious. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental. Honest.

Gregory awoke, and stared briefly with indifferent disgust at the sleeping form of last night's floozy next to him. He frowned at the inch of greasy foundation left on the pillow, then walked naked to the shower. Once clean and dressed, he caught his own reflection in the mirror, and half-smiled, half-smirked at it, before running his fingers of his left hand through his hair and miming a bone-crunching handshake with his right. He recited his daily mantra to himself: "the world is a far better place because I am in it." Pausing only to leave a brief note – "Thanks. Don't come back here" – on the aluminium kitchen worksurface, he exited the house and caught a taxi to work.

Gregory was last to enter the busy boardroom, specks of white powder still visible around his septum from a precursory visit to the bathroom. A bassy cough, and then: "Gentlemen." Both hands placed palm down on the desk, a lean forward. "I have a suggestion." Lean back again, hands pushed together prayer-like under the chin. "Let's drop the 'g'." A hubbub of appreciative murmuring. "Let's go for 'makin' – no g, but an apostrophe. It's Christmas – people don't want grammar for Christmas."

He half-closed his eyes, and the expected applause came. Then, from the darkest corner of the room, a lanky, nervous figure straightened up. "But, but Gregory..." it forced out through the clapping. "This expansion pack is already sort of, you know, ridiculous. It wasn't what I wanted to do. It's about witches, and b-baking beeswax. And, and, a-a-a 'magic town'. It's not about communities and relationships. People might not buy it if it's too, well, silly."

"People don't want grammar for Christmas."

The room was silent for precisely four seconds before the laughter began. "Ah, Mr... Bill Bright, isn't it?" smirked Gregory. "Always good to have your... input. What you're missing here is that we simply do not care about the complicated and enormously accomplished social engineering and AI you created in your game. People will buy it, whether you've had anything to do with it or not. All they want, these fools, these idiots, these saps, is more things to collect and to look at. They will buy it for the new soft furnishings, for the new outfits and the new wallpapers. They'll buy it because they get somewhere else to go – Magic Town, full of fascinatingly generic people to talk to and buy supernatural ingredients from. They will doggedly talk to all these people, doggedly collect all the ingredients, and doggedly make pointless spells from them, because it will give them an excuse to keep playing this game for another fortnight, even though they do not *really* have anything different to do. And all through this, they will never know if they are actually enjoying themselves. And they will never realise that the moronic theme of this gigantic cash-cow is the very definition of an opposing force to the technical and creative prowess that begat the original game."

Gregory leant forward again, and for the first time in a month, amusement flickered briefly in his eyes. "Gentlemen, it's decided. We drop the 'g'." He turned to the slumping Bright again with a cruel smile; "Now *that's* how you sell a game."

ALEC MEER

■ Publisher **EA** ■ Developer **Maxis** ■ Minimum System **PII 350, 64Mb, 1.3Gb HDD space, 2MB video card, The Sims** ■ Recommended **PIII 500, 128Mb, 8Mb video card, all other *Sims* expansions** ■ Multi-Player **None** ■ Web Address **www.thesims.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH AVOIDING...

Blair Witch Triple Pack
Abysmal trio of rubbished licensed games about a made-up witch.

Simon The Sorceror 3D
Miserably unfunny resurrection of the tediously purile adventure series.

PC GAMES addict
Visually adventurous, but a preposterous theme that smacks of desperation.

42%

GENRE: THIRD-PERSON ACTION

THE LORD OF THE RINGS THE RETURN OF THE KING

No shortage of enemies to whack here. In fact, you could say there's hordes of the things.

EXTRA EXTRA

What else do you get for your money? Interviews with the cast and other DVD-style goodies are unlocked as you progress, if that's your kind of thing, and of course there are those tantalising clips from the third film. But the best extra is surely Co-op Play, allowing you to hammer through the obstacles with a chum by your side. Top stuff.

WHY? Why did I pick Gimli? I could have been Aragorn. He's got the longest legs in Middle-Earth. He's called 'Strider', for pity's sake. Or Legolas: elves are famously fleet of foot. But no, I had to pick the character with the comedy beard.

Return of the King, you see, divides its action into three parallel plot strands, limiting your choice of player character. In one strand you play as Sam, with Frodo and Gollum as sidekicks, in another, Gandalf, but the third offers you an option: Aragorn, Legolas, or a stocky, axe-wielding Welsh midget who's not very good at running. Change from one strand to another between levels, or singlemindedly follow a particular series of adventures: either way you feel you're advancing the big story, which unfolds in juicy Gandalf-narrated clips from the films.

Every level is an orgy of console-style combat, and the amount of incidental action going on is sometimes incredible: battlements crashing down, Nazgul circling on their flying beasts, and literally dozens of superbly-animated characters fighting independently all around you, entirely unscripted. While the level of action recalls the mass combat scenes of the films, the look is of an Alan Lee painting brought to life. Given that Peter Jackson based his Middle-Earth on the work of this artist, *RotK* gets closer than most licences do to recreating the overall feel of the films. Or at least, how the films might have felt if the fight scenes went on for 15 hours.

"Your blows connect with a visceral thud."

Excellently, the moment the game starts you're thrown into all this at the deep end: the Helm's Deep end. You're Gandalf, in the thick of the fighting, without the faintest idea what you're supposed to do. Carnage. Siege ladders. Explosions. It's like *Medal of Honour*'s Omaha Beach, only with more orcs.

Happily, combat in *RotK* is superbly satisfying. Your blows connect with a solid, visceral thud you can almost feel, and you can hit your opponents hard enough to send them spinning through the air and fast enough to whack them again before they hit the ground. Two principle attacks have to be juggled: a Fast attack and a Fierce attack, plus Parry, vital against bigger opponents. Add Use, Physical Attack, Special Move, Jump Back and Ranged Weapon to this and you've got a game that decidedly doesn't lend itself to keyboard play. Dust off that joypad.

Fast attacks are quicker. Fierce attacks do more damage and shatter enemy shields. Combos are fiddly but bring your opponent's hit points down fastest of all. And it all matters, because the more blows you can chain together without receiving damage, the more experience points you get. And after each level you can spend that XP on newer, better combos for your character and other goodies.

Having characters who develop as you play brings a welcome touch of RPG depth. Nevertheless the Path of the King does have the drawback that you're effectively stuck with a character you picked on a whim at the start of the game. Gimli, for example. Unless you want to throw those hard-earned experience points away and pitch a beginning-level character against mid-level foes.

However, by this stage you've discovered a more serious problem with *RotK*. Moving. The viewpoint is continually changing, jumping from one camera to another or arcing around you as you run. All very cinematic, no doubt, but the result is that what was the correct direction on your keyboard or analog stick a moment

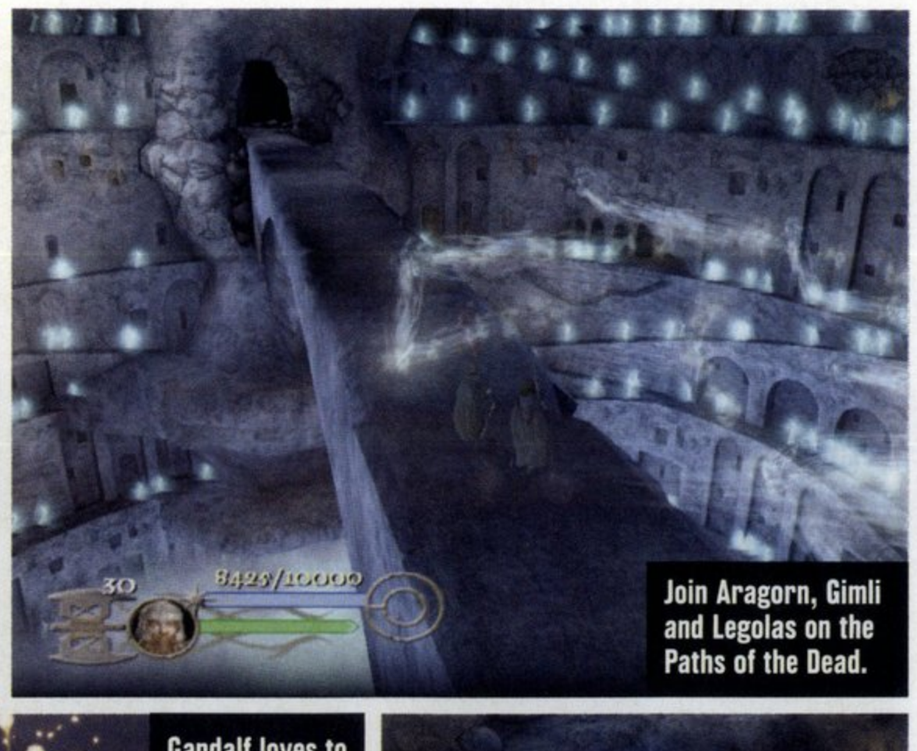
THE ROADS GO EVER ON AND ON

Battle through the whole game and you unlock the ability to play as any of the eight characters in any of the levels. The first time through, however, your choices are more limited.

As Gandalf you fight without companions, but with a deadly magical Special Move.

Play as Aragorn, Legolas or Gimli, and the other two will tag along to fight by your side.

On Team Hobbit you play as Sam, with Frodo and Gollum usually there to help you. Usually.



Join Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas on the Paths of the Dead.

A little strategy can help to defeat tougher foes.

Gandalf loves to blow stuff up.

SYSTEM MISER

How *Return of the King* will play on *your* PC

■ Supported resolutions: **640x480 to 2048x1536** ■ Scaleable options: **32/16 bit graphics, character detail, shadows, special effects**

VERDICT: **This being a cross-platform effort there aren't many options to change, but then again, this being a cross-platform effort no self-respecting games PC should have any trouble running it. In fact, if your PC was only top of the range a year and a half ago it should have no trouble. A processor over 1GHz and a GeForce 4 will do the trick.**

Regal

ago is now sending you somewhere ridiculously to the right or left of where you want to go. You're forever aiming at doors and running smack into walls.

The fact that you can only turn in console-style 45-degree jerks doesn't help much. Aside from making it fiddly to aim your ranged weapon, most of the time it makes it impossible to move in a straight line – because your path lies precisely between two of your eight available directions of movement. Half the time you have to zig-zag: careering off walls, running into foes, and generally crashing about like a madman in a bouncy castle.

The levels themselves are commendably varied. In one you're Gandalf on the battlements of Minas Tirith, running frantically to and fro fending off siege ladders, in the next you're Sam, battling giant spiders as you hunt for Frodo in Shelob's lair. Here and there the scenery is interactive, enabling you to throw torches, fire siege catapults, and on one occasion send a gigantic bell rolling and ringing down a spiral staircase, flattening orcs as it goes. The levels also tend to be quite extensive – which is good, obviously. You can only save after completing a level, however, which is not so good when you're forced to slog through the same sequences over and over again. Imagine a level where you have to outrun an avalanche of falling rocks chasing you through a long, tortuous complex of collapsing tunnels, and every time you die you have to do it all over again. Imagine how much importance that places on your ability to run fast. Now imagine you chose Gimli.

How many hours did I spend trying to steer that lumbering short-arse safely through those tunnels before I cracked it? I don't remember. I don't want to remember. I've had far too much fun to hold one nightmare experience against this game. *RotK* loses marks for its rubbish cross-platform control system, but gains loads for being the most sumptous looking, intensely enjoyable third-person action title we've seen on the PC in ages.

TONY ELLIS

PCGA PROFILE

Return of the King is:
- **Beautiful**
- **Intense**
- **Cross-platform**

Return of the King is not:
- **Boring**
- **Bland**
- **Another rubbish movie licence**

■ Publisher **EA** ■ Developer **In-house** ■ Minimum System **PIII 700, 128Mb RAM, DirectX 8.1 3D card, 2GB hard disk space** ■ Recommended **P4, 256Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **Co-op, two players** ■ Web Address **www.eagames.com/official/lordoftherings** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Chaos Legion
More third-person fantasy combat. Doesn't look remotely as good as *RotK*.

BloodRayne
More third-person combat, but lordy, what a person. Plus: zombie Nazis.

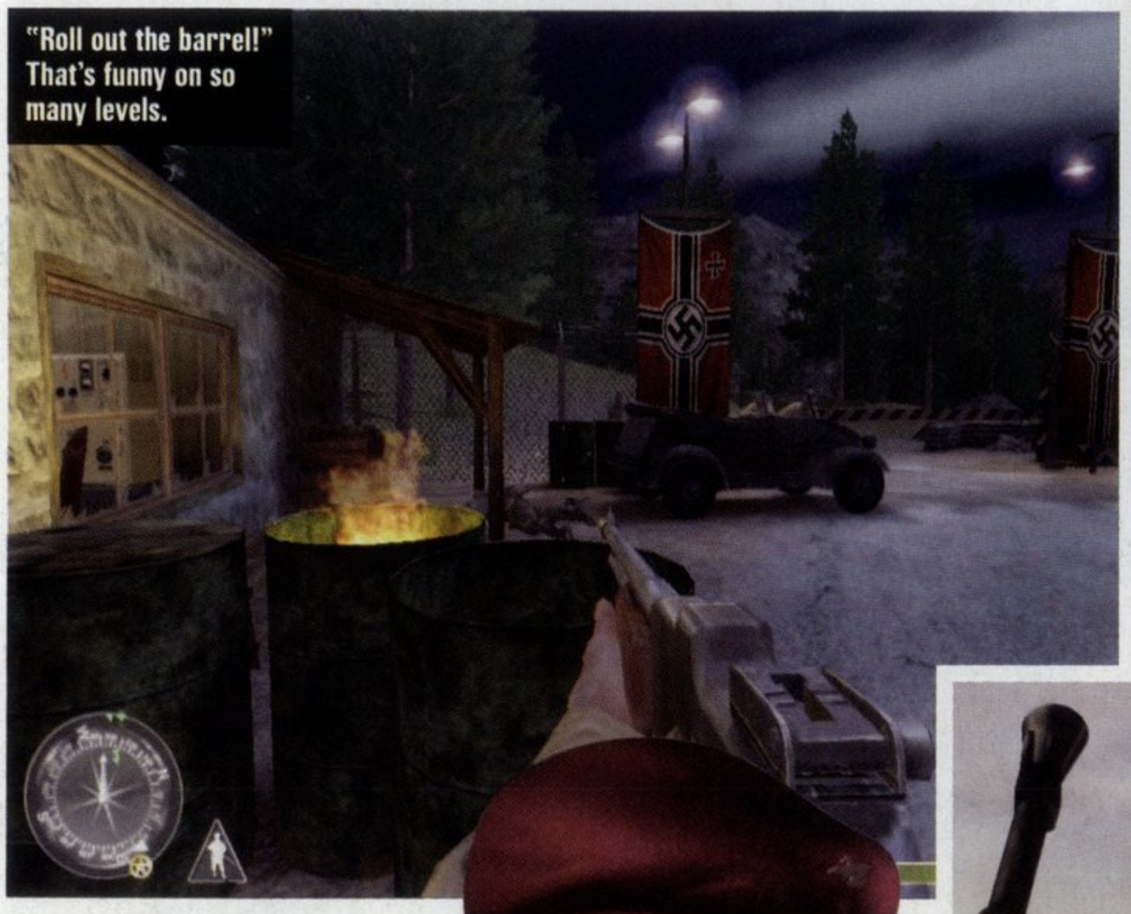
PC GAMES addict
Intense, top-drawer third-person action that plays as good as it looks.

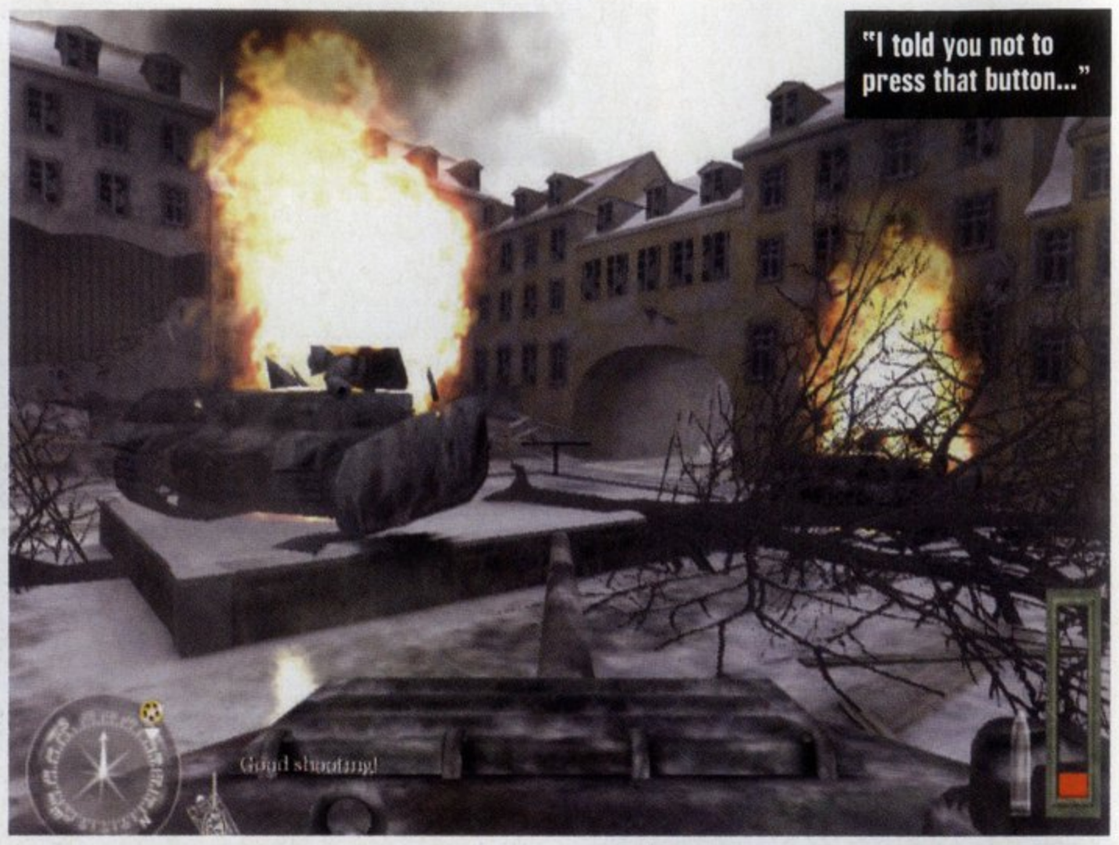
85%

GENRE: FIRST PERSON SHOOTER

CALL OF DUTY

War determines not who is right, but only who is left.





A cat recently moved into my house. Small and vicious, the creature is an excellent barometer of videogame intensity. Having used claws to scale leg and tabletop, he watches the activity on my monitor. He'll sit bolt upright through a twenty-minute game of *Quake III*. He'll relax and do tongue-to-fur thing if I'm just running about in *PlanetSide*. If I'm clicking my way through a few hours of *Medieval* he'll lie back, idly eyeing the screen. Once the mining session in *EVE Online* gets going, he's asleep. On the feline-attention gauge *Call of Duty* rides high: weird little eyes fixed unblinkingly on the screen, head bobbing at the cascade of astonishing sonic intensity. He likes this game.

And so do I.

Getting the mechanical scream of guns and bombs just right is something that war-based shooters are now honing to a fine art. In 2002 we visited that ground with visceral gusto in the much-lauded World War II shooter *Medal of Honour* and now, some twenty-one months later, we're diving back into that same hail of bullets for *Call of Duty*.

The game takes a now-familiar formula and drops it down the mortar-tube of thematic development. Anyone who has played through *Medal of Honour* will find themselves in well-trodden territory and for a good third of the game will have a sense of déjà vu: we've died here before. But what makes *Call of Duty* stand out as a landmark game is the fact that it lands you, bomb-like, in the middle of more memorable-moments-per-minute than any shooter in the last two years.

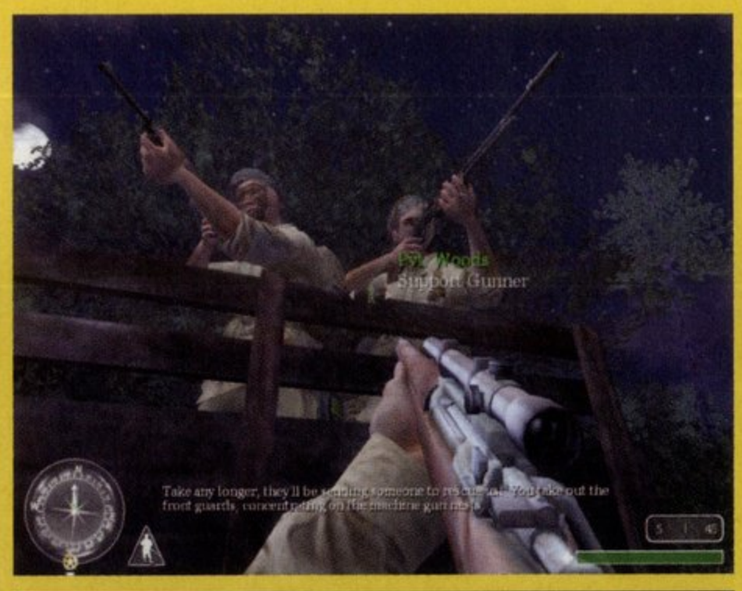
There are some exhilarating scenarios: the defence of a bridge against assaulting troops, just holding out for a few more minutes... Trapped inside a building in Stalingrad in much the same situation – you've just got to stay alive until reinforcements arrive. The action is

WAR ON ALL FRONTS

Variety is *Call of Duty*'s strong suit. It dishes out a combat taste of World War II's Western and Eastern fronts, where you fight as a British, American and Russians soldier. You'll meet comrades in arms along the way, men like...

Capt Price
Submachine Gunner
Picked up Sten and grenade ammo
Thank God we still have that flak gun. We can use it to hold the bridge until our relief shows up

Captain Price is a solid English gent with some pretty good ideas about how to put the wind up Jerry.


Pvt. Woods
Support Gunner
Take any longer, they'll be sending someone to rescue us. You take out the front guards, concentrating on the machine gun nests

The Yanks are out in force and they're behind enemy lines. Give them cover as they attack a base.

Embittered patriots from the Soviet Union provide a welcome dodgy Russian accent. Or corpse.

Comrades! This day will be the proudest day you have ever lived! You will fight the fascist Nazi invaders with all your strength! For each and every fallen Soviet soldier, you will make them pay ten times over! There will be no mercy for defeatists, cowards, or traitors! Anyone caught deserting his post will be shot!

Impacked

unrelenting and various: single-handedly sabotaging the defences of a German hydro-electric dam; facing a high-speed chase through mountain roads; infiltrating a German battleship and charging enemy bunkers in heavy snow. There are constant twists and turns and every bit of it is packed with hyper-kinetic gun action.

Nor are you trapped within the role of one American GI this time. *Call of Duty* puts you in the body of a British paratrooper, an American paratrooper and a Russian conscript. The experiences of all three soldiers are quite different, but in every case they are in the vital heart of the war and witnessing key events, from the liberation of Stalingrad to the capture of installations after D-Day. The story sweeps you along, drenching your senses in the sheer intensity of a war that stands out as the single most important event in human history. Playing *Call of Duty* makes you feel like a god-damned bona fide hero and, for just a moment, turns your thoughts to just how little we know of the millions of events that made up that stupefying conflict.

"The terror in the faces of Russian conscripts..."

Of course these moments of reverie would not be possible if the game were not as finely engineered as it actually is. Visually *Call of Duty* is very strong – not a patch on the quantum leaps of *Half-Life 2* and *Doom III*, admittedly, but the *Call of Duty* team have completely rebuilt the *Quake III* technologies that the game is based on, leaving little of the deathmatch masterpiece other than the technical backroom file management stuff. This means they're able to pull off some huge battles – there are a couple of scenes where there are literally hundreds of soldiers on the screen at once. The detail of the environments, the sheer scale of the battlefields where that action takes place, all help to intensify the first-person experience a little more. We're constantly seeing increasingly impressive technology in our FPS games and, while not as astonishing as something like *Far Cry*, or as stylish as something like *XIII*, *Call of Duty*'s world is believable and tangible. Granted, there are some bland pieces of level design in *Call of Duty*, but you get that everywhere.

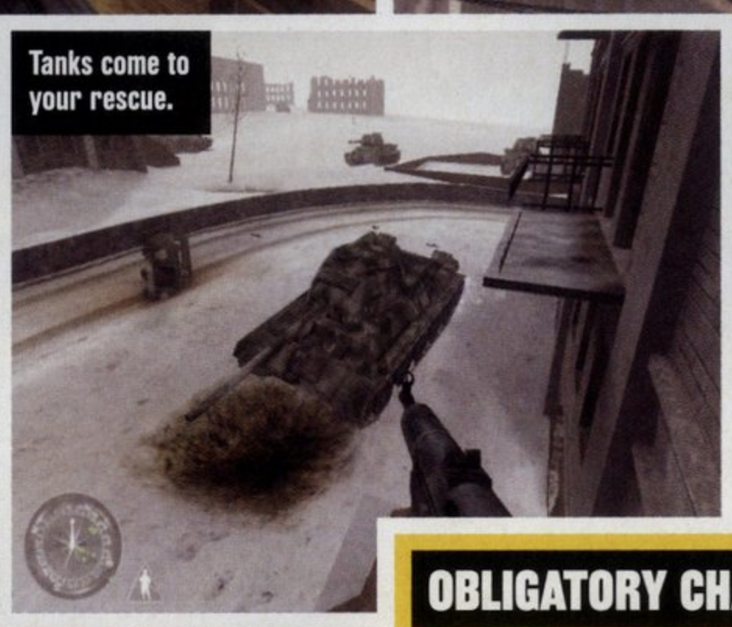
continued over

SHELL SHOCKED

Death is the worst side-effect of being caught in a blast. If the shell doesn't hit you head-on, you'll still be facing massive debilitation though, as *Call of Duty* includes the most believable shell-shock effect that we've ever seen in a game. Blurred vision, slowed-down movement and deafened hearing leave you momentarily stunned as you stumble around the battlefield.

Surly Russians abound in the ruins of Berlin.

Battle rages on a staggering scale over the sprawling, battered outdoor spaces.

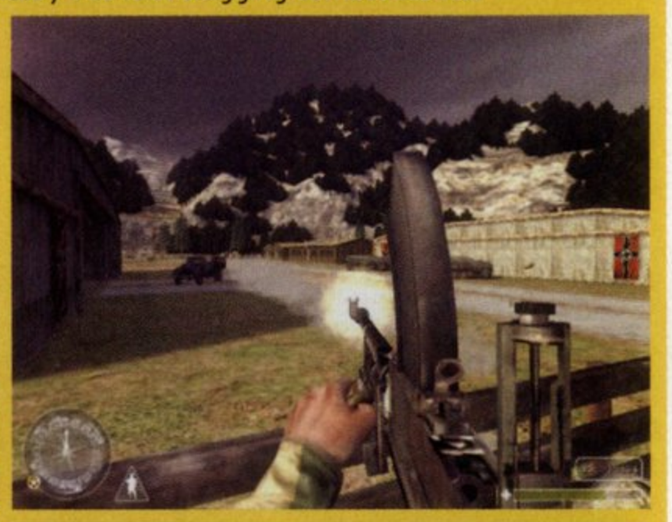

Tanks come to your rescue.

Pvt. Hammon
Support Gunner
Gentlemen, we've fought a whole bunch of these, so I know you know what to do
But indulge me. Move quickly, cover your buddies, don't bunch up - and for
heavens' sake don't stop 'till we reach those bunkers
You will fight alongside all these men in open battle.

OBLIGATORY CHASE SEQUENCE

You can use vehicles as both a driver and passenger. The tank is enormously entertaining, with plenty to blow up, and the mechanised sequences blend seamlessly into foot-slogging combat scenes.

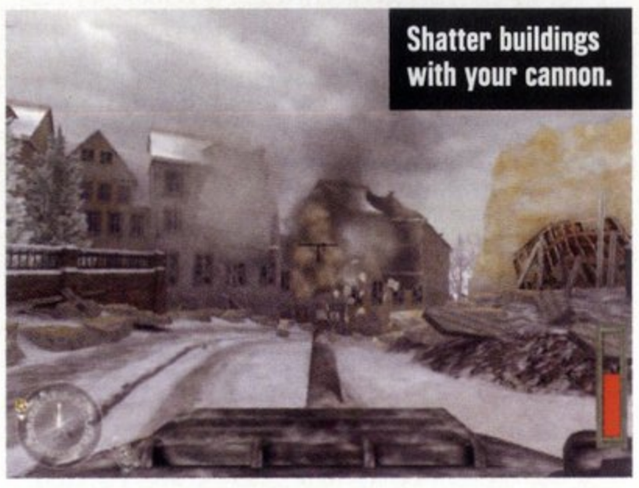
Tanks! Like stupendous war-winning mechanisms of automatic death. Which they are.


Ride the back of a truck and fend off attackers with panzerfausts and a Bren gun, today!

ON THE TIME GAUGE

Many of the missions are timed. On the regular difficulty setting this just makes for a bit of tension but, on the harder settings it becomes almost impossible. *Call of Duty* is a game that becomes exponentially trickier as the levels ramp up the challenge. While most FPS players will breeze through the regular setting, the tougher levels require stern grit and an enormous slice of patience as you bemoan yet another violent death.

The sound too is staggering. Play this game with a 5.1 system turned up loud and you will be dodging the bullets and shuddering at the explosions. *Call of Duty* excels in its effects, from the sound and sight of projectiles smacking into brick-work to the brutal shell-shock effects of being caught in a blast. This is an audio-visual smack round the chops. Best of all is the complexity of animation, the superb voice acting and the masterful facial animations that give your fellow soldiers real character. Seeing the terror in the faces of other Russian conscripts does start to give you the willies. That strange waddling gait that all the soldiers seem to have is a little disconcerting though...


Shatter buildings with your cannon.

And fighting alongside other soldiers is at the heart of what *Call of Duty* is about. You are hardly ever alone through your battles and, while you might split up from the squads here and there, you will find yourself meeting many characters as the story progresses, often hooking up

"Using a dead cow as a shield from gunfire..."

with (and accidentally shooting) allied forces as the levels unfold. Whether that's a squad of stiff-upper-lipped boys from Blighty or a sardonic Russian sniper, embittered by the realities of war, they're colourful and believable. More importantly to the game itself, they fight well too. This is partly due to the fact that they're stupendously tough and can take a supernatural amount of damage, but if you ignore that little reality slip, you'll find yourself enjoying working with the AI to overcome the problems the game throws at you. Lay down suppressing fire and your mates will charge forward – if you need to get somewhere they'll yell at you, telling you what to do and how they're going to help you. They'll chuck grenades back at the enemy and, most impressively of all, they know how to use the cover they come across. They'll hide behind walls, use a dead cow as a shield from machinegun fire or duck behind windows, utilising cover as real soldiers would. The flanking manoeuvres actually work most of the time too. Enemies will assault from both sides if they can, or fall back if it will gain them a tactical advantage. These touches combine to create the best sense of fighting alongside believable AI that we've ever encountered – although given how solid the AI is in games such as *Freedom Fighters* this might well become an increasingly regular experience.

One thing that does annoy though, is just how tough the opposition is. Everyone can take a few shots, but the sheer amount of times that enemies get

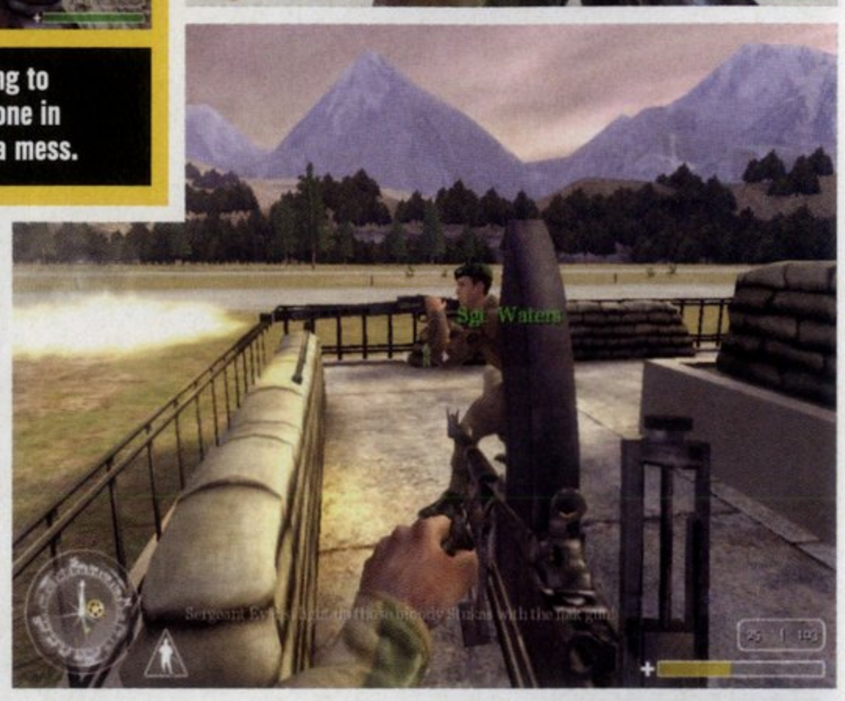
DAM(N) THAT STRUCTURALISM

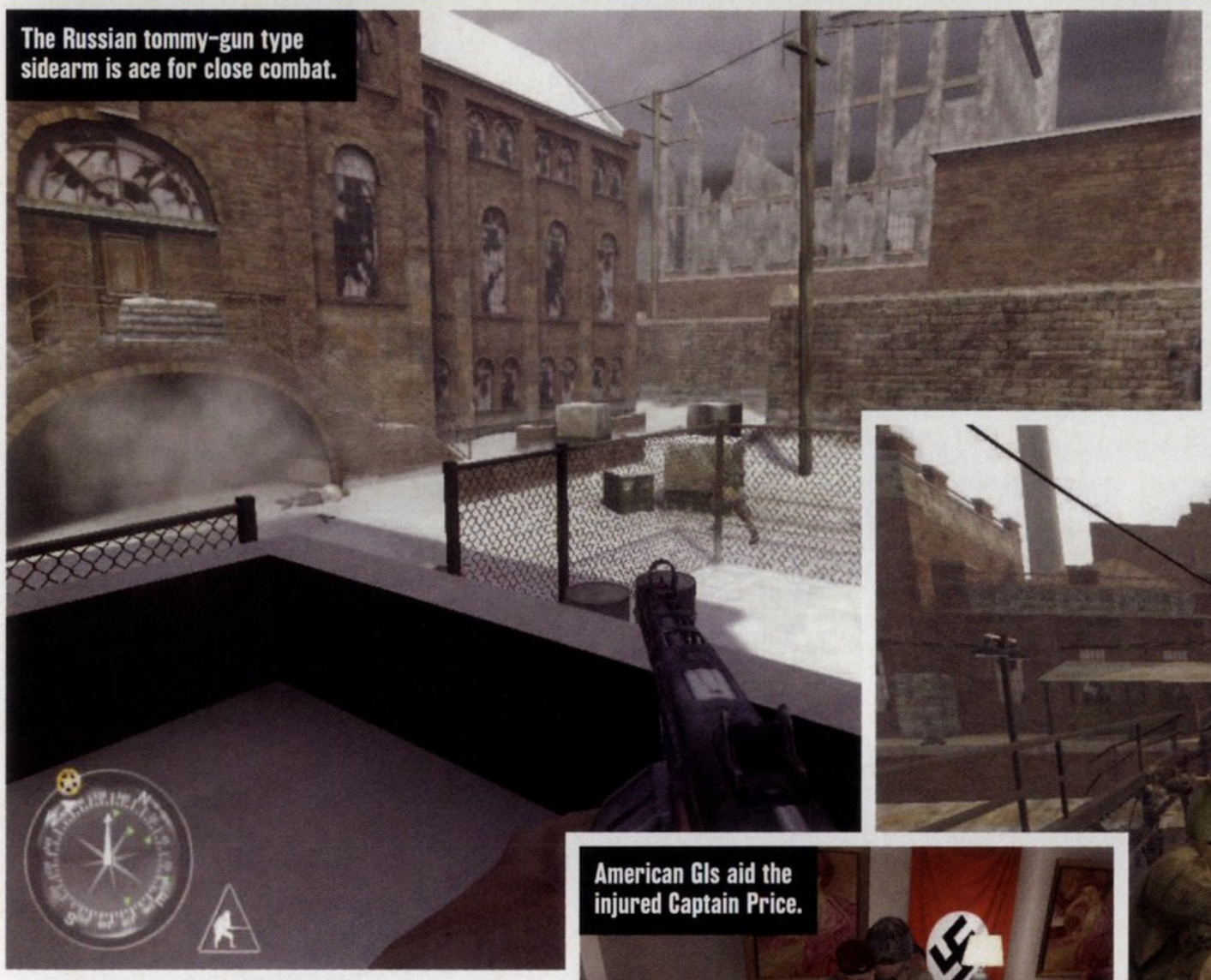
Connoisseurs of '30s and '40s architecture will find themselves seriously distracted from the unrelenting action.

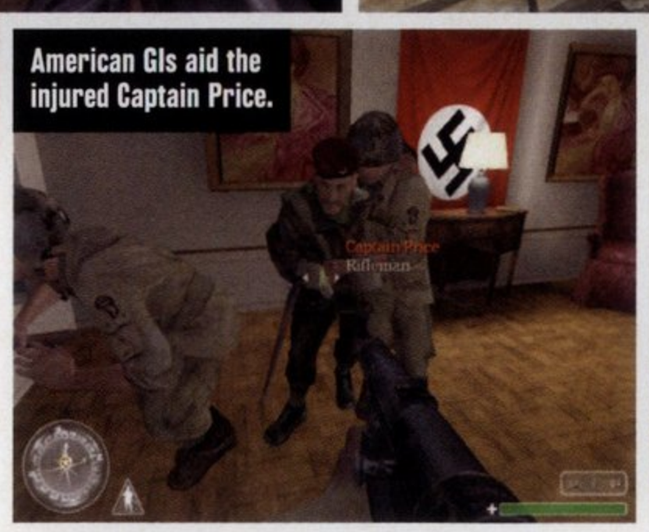
Ooh, I've always wanted a marbled '20s villa built by a Frenchman. Just without the Nazi décor, obviously.

Obligatory Dam 12b is well engineered, beautifully lit and one of the most entertaining sabotage sequences.

Once this is over, there's going to be some serious tidying up done in central Europe. The place is a mess.







back up after being shot is just silly. You also feel more vulnerable than in most games of this type – if a German soldier opens up with a sub-machinegun at close range then you're one of the glorious dead for sure. It's a balance that adds a palpable level of tension, although such bloody realism has to be counterbalanced by a shocking amount of medical kits to patch yourself up with. Most of the levels are something of a health-hoovering exercise, but you're only really likely to notice this if you're a pernickety type, like I'm paid to be. Throughout *Call of Duty* you feel drawn into the combat, compulsively so, and it's a genuine test of your gaming talents. You have to use duck and crouch positions, and the lean functions are vital too. This is a game where such things are not mere options: they are imperatives.

Returning to the AI for a moment, it's worth mentioning that the complexity of the AI character's skills means that 'emergent' moments do arise, over and above the scripted background. Saving a soldier from being clubbed to death by two Nazis, who had decided to attack at close quarters rather than reload their rifles, was one just moment that made my heart jump as I played. The death of buddies is a grim reality too – especially when it's clearly your fault. It's possible to replay a mission and feel quite gratified that, this time around, you saved the old boy. He'll never know the death he could have faced.

But the actuality of the game means that this is a linear story, one that is defined by the set-piece situations that explode around you. To avoid spoiling the story I've been attempting to be fairly vague about what you actually *do* – the very best things that happen in *Call of Duty* are moments I don't want to rob of shock value. Just as the glorious impact of the beach-storming in *Medal of Honour* was dulled by over-exposure, so it seems likely that the events I recently blabbered about to the rest of the GAMER team will become events that will be heavily trodden topics on forums, in magazines and in general conversation. But take it from me: really cool stuff happens in *Call of Duty* and the final scene is one of the most satisfying denouements of a videogame in recent times. (Particularly if you know anything about the closing days of the war.)

What I must mention, however, is that there is a short tank section, with you piloting the tank itself. Though it's not in the *Battlefield 1942* league, it is solid, simple and a vast improvement over a similar exercise in *Medal of Honour: Spearhead*. What's more, continued over

THE HAIRS

Aim is, of course, one of the most important factors in a first person shooter. Naturally, *Call of Duty* allows you to fire from the hip, providing a 'moving cone' cross hair to aid your aim and to show how inaccurate you're being. For more accuracy though, at the expense of mobility, you can look down the barrel of your gun. When it comes to the bolt action rifles, it's almost essential.

And sidecars! The chase sequences are a series of hilarious encounters.

SYSTEM MISER

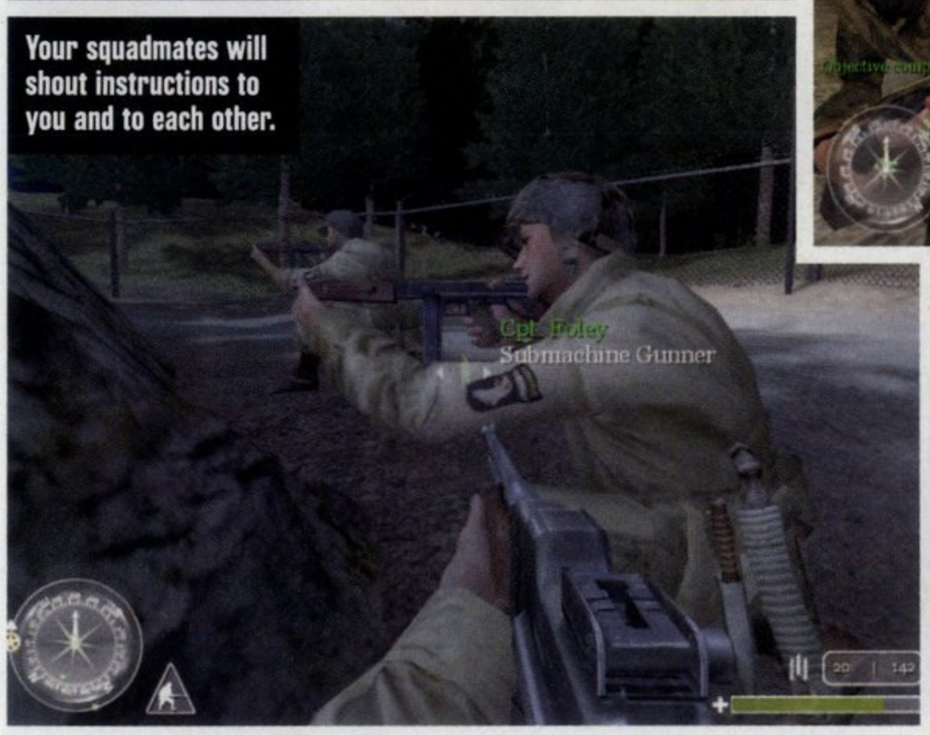
How *Call of Duty* will run on *your* PC.

■ Supported resolutions: **640x480 to something stupidly enormous** ■
Scaleable options: **Texture Detail, player detail, particle effects**

VERDICT: **While not the game that that's going to be pushing your machine to the limit, the medium range PCs with ageing graphics cards might struggle a bit with *Call of Duty* on the higher resolutions. That said, on a P4 2.4GHz with a GeForce 4400 the whole game looked awesome and ran smoothly at 1600x1200. Owners of older machines will be playing a much uglier game.**

Group photo! Group photo!

Burglary is made much easier with a sub-machinegun and two heavily armed friends.



Your squadmates will shout instructions to you and to each other.

Dams always feature in WWII games. But why?

there are a couple of exhilarating and cinematic 'on rails' pursuit sequences, where you are the gun-toting passenger aboard a speeding vehicle. These sections pep up the game with a refreshing change of pace, mixing up the gameplay with Hollywood-style car chases.

There is no mechanised action in the multi-player game, which is a little disappointing, if unsurprising. Nevertheless it's a decent experience, using the 'pick a starting weapon' method of the other realistic combat FPS games. In the full game you can only carry two weapons and in multi-player only a rifle and pistol, plus the grenades. *Call of Duty* has deathmatch and team-deathmatch, but also two unique modes: Behind Enemy Lines and Retrieval. Retrieval is a capture the flag variant, where objects must be taken to a specific area on the map and the two teams battle it out to ensure it does or doesn't get there. The Behind Enemy Lines mode is slightly different, with one team just having to stay alive, while the other must kill them. It's highly entertaining. The multi-player maps are generally intelligently crafted too, better, on average, than many other multi-player games we could mention. But, as a team game, *Call of Duty* is not a patch on *Enemy Territory* and doesn't have the polish of *Day of Defeat*. (Although it's many times more attractive to play.)

"Players will return for a second and third helping."

Of course most of us will just be playing *Battlefield 1942* if we want World War II action online and, in all honesty, the single-player campaign is where the action is. And at the end, when the final credits rolled, I was left feeling a little disappointed. *Call of Duty* could well have been a little longer, a little more climactic, reached higher on the crescendos of action. I wanted to play for another few hours, although no doubt the cat would have begun to lose interest.

Short and sweet? Yes it is, and players will return to for a second and third helping. Personally, I'm going to go straight back in and play from the beginning as soon as I type these final words. It's the most fun I've had since, well, *Medal of Honour*, hence the high score. Ah, sweet irony, the very best things in life never last, but doesn't that just tantalise the senses even more?

JIM ROSSIGNOL

PCGA PROFILE

Call Of Duty is:
- **Varied**
- **Frenetic**
- **Intelligent**

Call Of Duty is not:
- **Highly original**
- **Long enough**
- **Multi-player heaven**

■ Publisher **Activision** ■ Developer **Infinity Ward** ■ Minimum System **PIII 600, 128Mb RAM, 3D card**
■ Recommended **P4 1.5GHz, 512Mb RAM, GeForce 3 or better** ■ Multi-Player **LAN, internet, up to 32 players**
■ Web Address **www.callofduty.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

MOH: Allied Assault
Until *Call Of Duty* came along, this was the most intense war shooter around. Classic.

Battlefield: 1942
Insane, cluster-flock war game that's transformed online battlefields.

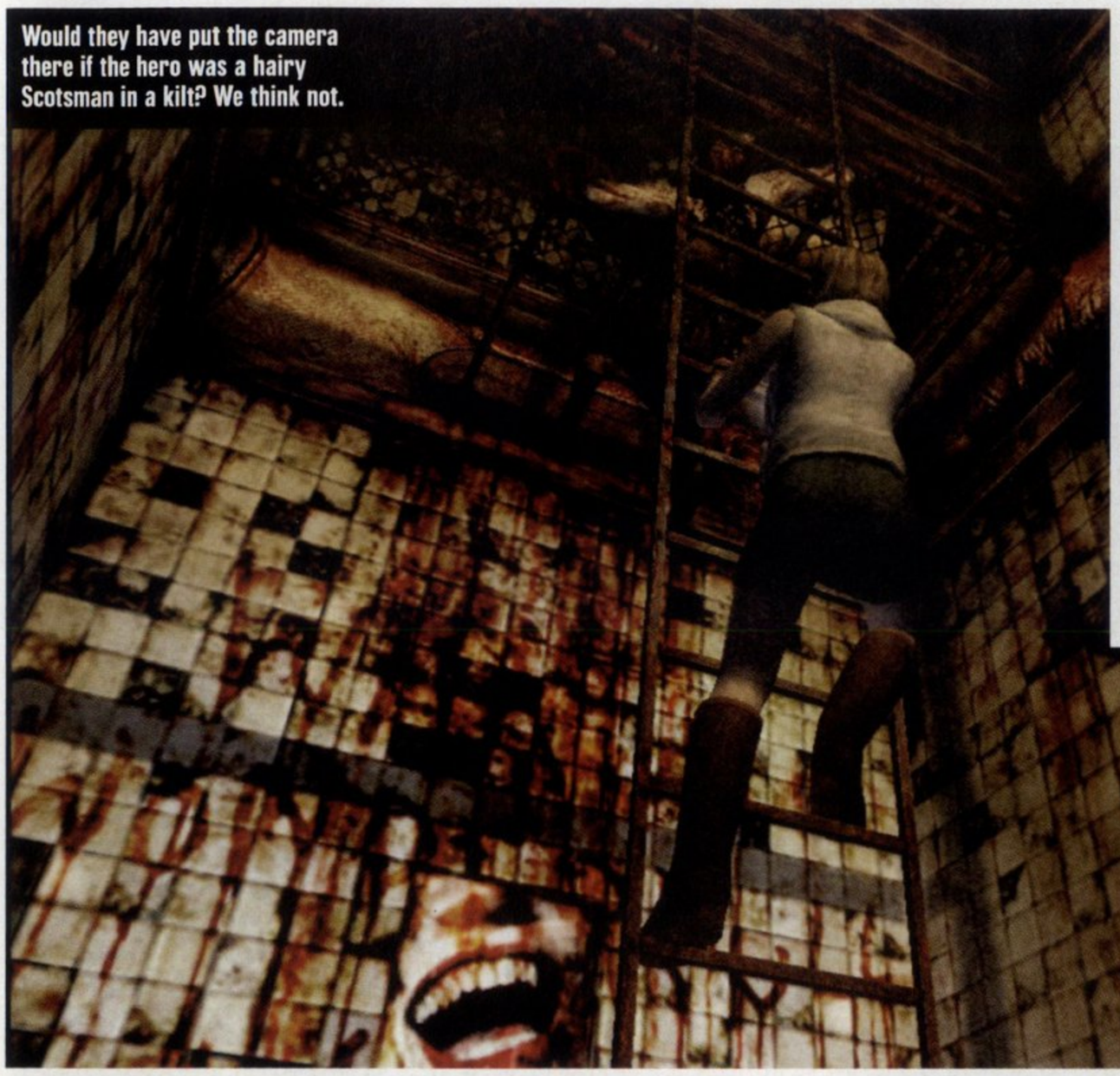
PC GAMES addict
A veteran of the genre, with many exciting war stories to tell.

91%

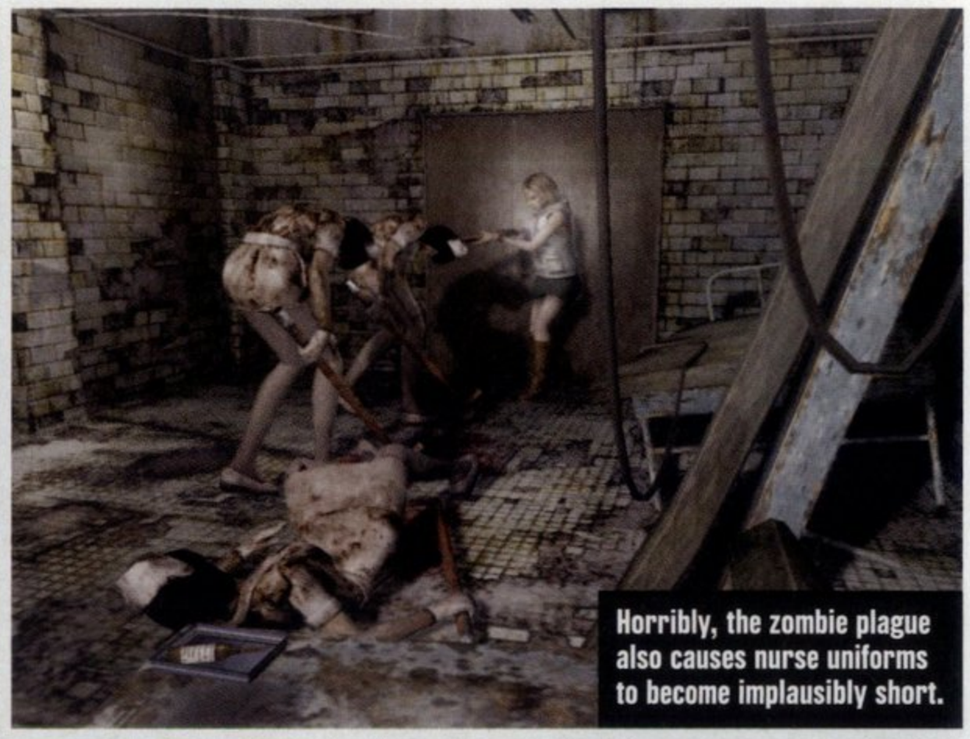
GENRE: SURVIVAL-HORROR

SILENT HILL 3

We're still waiting for the Bush Tucker Man survival horror game.



Would they have put the camera there if the hero was a hairy Scotsman in a kilt? We think not.



Horribly, the zombie plague also causes nurse uniforms to become implausibly short.

What Harvey the invisible rabbit *really* looks like.

SILENT NIGHT, UNHOLY NIGHT

Out go *Resi*'s rota of slow moving zombies, and in come mis-shapen lumps of flesh, killer nurses, Thing-like dogs, and other beasts simply too hard to describe. That you can move and shoot far easier than in *Resi* makes offing them a much more enjoyable prospect, too.

PCGA PROFILE

Silent Hill 3 is:
- **Creepy**
- **Atmospheric**
- **Better than Resi**

Silent Hill 3 is not:
- **For wusses**
- **A major genre evolution**
- **Always logical**

Wicked

IT'S not been a healthy year for survival horror. With Raccoon City's resident flesh-munchers beginning to look fitter than the lazy console conversions they inhabit, the scene needed a shot in the arm. At the very least, a medicinal combo of green and blue pot plants... And in the absence of *Resident* pin-up Jill Valentine that responsibility falls to *Silent Hill 3*'s heroine Heather – and the only-slightly-more-pallid abominations that haunt her every step.

If your experience of survival horror games on the PC is limited to that of the *Resi* series, then the thought of painfully tedious door transitions, a control system that actively hinders your passage, save points limited to typewriters, and an interface clearly designed before the mouse was born may frighten you more than anything prowling the dark corridors of the game.

Thankfully, *SH3*'s creators have clearly been wearing garlic and crucifixes to repel that kind of evil. Hence the control system allows for mouse-look and strafing, the interface is of a far more simple and user-friendly design (although still features the contemptible 'Combine' command), and loading times between level sections are kept blissfully brief. Hell, you can even quicksave your way around the game. Will wonders never cease?

Actually, they will. Within minutes of the game starting. Some daft dialogue, plain silly puzzles, and an opening sequence that immediately throws you into a no-win situation, all irritate rather than intrigue.

"An adult game that doesn't rely on gore."

Still, the cinematic feel and ominous atmosphere is cleverly conjured throughout thanks to genuinely astonishing cut-scenes, fluid character animation and inventive camera angles. It still feels restrictive in places – not being able to see a nearby monster thanks to an occasionally obtuse choice of view, for instance, remains hugely annoying. But once the lights go out and you're having to use a weedy flashlight to illuminate your path, the tension meter goes off the scale.

And a special word must go to the soundtrack. So often an overlooked (or underused) feature of videogames, here it's an integral instrument of terror. Metallic scrapes, screeches and groans instil panic despite the absence of immediate danger, while guitars simultaneously eerie and maudlin create a mood that evokes the supernatural and the sentimental without you fully knowing why.

Silent Hill 3 is that rare thing: an adult game that doesn't rely on gore or violence, instead using the player's own imagination to provide many of the anticipatory jumps. Scary, great-looking, and – shock horror – even a good PC conversion, *Silent Hill 3* is the pinnacle of the survival horror genre. Or, as we've elected to call it, *President Evil*.

MATT PIERCE

■ Publisher **Konami** ■ Developer **In-house** ■ Minimum System **1GHz, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card**
■ Recommended **1.4GHz, 512Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **None**
■ Web Address **www.konami.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Resident Evil 3: Nemesis
Half-hearted conversion spoils an otherwise terrifying genre classic.

The Thing
Excellent icy survival horror that captures the spirit of the original film.

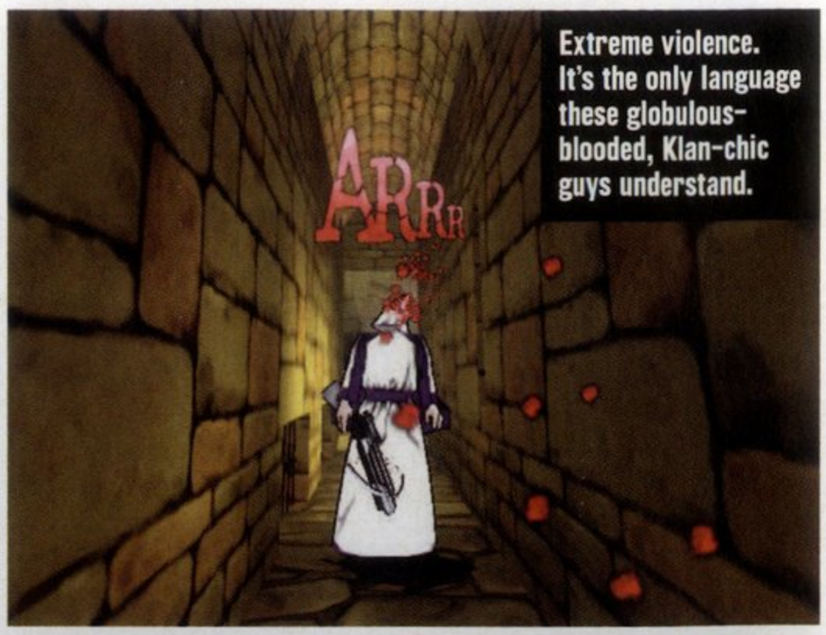
PC GAMES addict
A console classic improved for the PC – a major shock, but a nice one.

83%

XIII

GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

The flashy lights are most definitely on, but is there anyone at home?



MEMORY BLISS

Most of the plot thickens on-screen through some surprisingly watchable cut-scenes. But the more cryptic details are saved for the superbly directed flashback sequences, where a mundane detail flares up a specific chunk of *XIII*'s memory. You retain control throughout, until the story's been told and your overcharged synapses can take no more.

WHILE FPS loons continue to rock backwards and forwards in increasingly desperate anticipation of *Doom III*, *Deus Ex 2* and... the other one, *XIII* has sneaked in through a side-door and thrust a slinky, cel-shaded flag into the base. This is an FPS with soul. It looks good, it feels good, it plays good, but – entirely unrelated to its Frenchness – it's just a teensy bit too pleased with itself.

Based on an apparently popular French-language comic series (born in 1984 and still running), *XIII* slots you into the sturdy moccasins of a middle-aged bloke who washes up on a New England beach – minus possessions and memory. Soon the bullets are pinging, and it's down to 'XIII' (tattooed on his collar-bone) to work out who he, his friends and his enemies are – particularly given that someone seems very keen for him to die before he manages it.

Although it's hardly a great leap forward in terms of innovation or technical wonder, there are plenty of reasons to feel good about handing over 80 bucks for *XIII*. For a start, we finally have a contender for *Half-Life*'s long-standing Best. Intro. Ever.

Here, our hero begins his adventure squinting down the cleavage of a lady lifeguard who gingerly steers him back to her beach cabin for tea and CAT-scannery. After much stumbling and hallucinating, a passing helicopter triggers the first of many thrilling flashback sequences (in which you have a limited control), featuring XIII on a boat, being hunted by unseen assassins. He dives overboard. Cut to: beach cabin. Take this mysterious safety-deposit box key, says lady lifeguard, before being gunned to bits by a fresh crew of killers. That's XIII's cue to spring forth from his sick-bed and begin laying righteous rage onto the persistent hitmen.

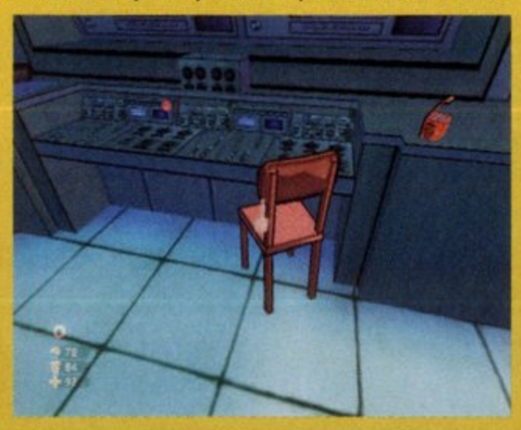
"Some pretty icky violence and choice language."

All of the standard FPS conventions are present and correct – objective-based missions, a bouncy walk, a healthy spread of weapons (shotgun, crossbow, sniper-rifle...), jump, crouch, use item... What raises *XIII* above the ordinary is the sumptuous, cel-shaded/graphic novel

ON ME 'EAD, SON...

Mr XIII is frequently required to forego automatic weaponry and improvise with bits of scenery. Three of the best...

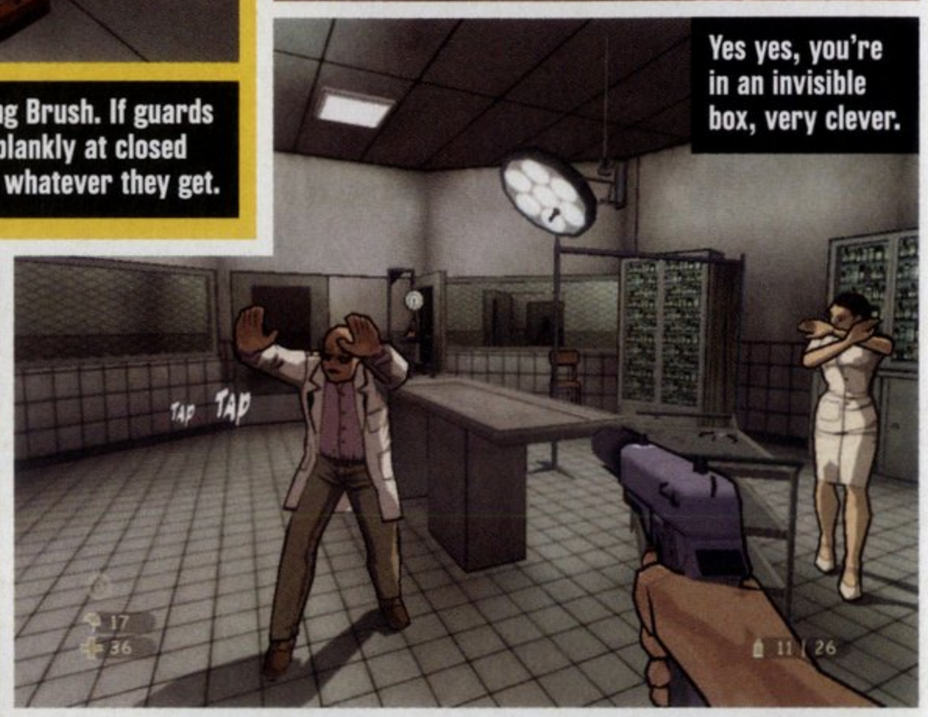
Death By Glass-Slash. A close-up, flesh-ripping zzzip, or a long-range, ninja-style flick. Either way, incisive.



Unconsciousness By Chair. Although flimsy enough to shatter on impact, chairs always knock folk unconscious.

Sore Head By Sweeping Brush. If guards will insist on staring blankly at closed lockers, they deserve whatever they get.

Even with a pretend rocket launcher, XIII is lethal.



Yes yes, you're in an invisible box, very clever.

Lobbing crossbow bolts into warehouse labourers' forebrains is all part of the fun.

SYSTEM MISER

How *XIII* will play on *your* PC

- Supported resolutions: **640X480 to 1600x1200**
- Scaleable options: **Contrast, gamma.**

VERDICT: **Looks are everything in *XIII* and there's a big difference between 800x600 and the higher resolutions. In 1024x768 with a 32Mb GeForce 4 (Athlon XP 1800), there's a faint sense of chug, but nothing major. Anything less than 512Mb of RAM and you'll be chugging at 800x600, though. Either way, a 64Mb card makes all the difference. Now's the time to upgrade.**

Sketchy

ambience and the precision pacing of the storytelling. The action is presented as a series of set-pieces, with off-screen elements illustrated through little comic-book insets – complete with Batman-style verbalised sound effects ('Whoosh!', 'Bok!', 'Smeck!'). Popping a bad guy in the head with a one-shot kill calls up a particularly satisfying three-frame series which depicts the projectile entry in gruesome, slo-mo detail, usually followed by an "Aieeeeee!"-accompanied tumble from a high walkway.

There's an excellent explore-reward system which, as you uncover certain 'important documents', boosts your skill-set (eliminating sniper-sight jitters, making you fleeter of foot in stealthy situations and so forth). One of these skills – Sixth Sense – manages to lend some much-needed originality to the sneakier moments. Instead of peeping round corners, XIII can hang back and track enemy movements via their footsteps – depicted in 'Tap...tap' audio-visual sound effects.

It's a grown-ups' game, with some pretty icky violence and a touch of choice language here and there, and the no-nonsense, action movie swagger is irresistible. XIII himself is an odd blend of Bond and Luc Besson's Leon – his suitably gravelly voice-over disappointingly phoned in by a bored-sounding David Duchovny.

Annoyingly, most of the more subtle features seen in the demo are underused. Although it's fun to nab a hostage as cover for escape from a heavily guarded area, I only really had to do it once. The same for bashing people over the head with scenery.

Still, for every teeth-grinding moment there's plenty of intelligent game design which feels informed by the good bits of previous games. The comedy guard conversations are very *No One Lives Forever*, the slick level design and just-stupid-enough enemy AI seems inspired by the Nintendo 64's *GoldenEye*, and overall it has the effortless, cinematic ambience the *Metal Gear Solid* designers have been trying to tap into for years. Like vegging out with a brainless but elegant blockbuster movie; no new ground broken, no brain required, but noisy and nasty and good-looking and great fun while it lasts.

ANDY LOWE

PCGA PROFILE

XIII is:
- **Compulsive**
- **Pretty**
- **Pretty good**

XIII is not:
- **Perfect**
- **Deep**
- **The future of FPS**

■ Publisher **Ubi Soft** ■ Developer **Ubi Soft Studio Paris** ■ Minimum System **PIII 700MHz, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card** ■ Recommended **P4 1GHz, 512Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **LAN, internet, up to 32 players** ■ Web Address **www.whoisxiii.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

PC GAMES addict

Flawed, light on substance, but oozing Gallic style and criminally playable.

78%

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

No-One Lives Forever
Similar feel with just as much instant gratification and comedy bad guys.

Hitman 2: Silent Assassin
Equally tense and lone badass-driven, but with a bit more complexity in the stealth.

GENRE: TACTICAL SHOOTER

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

Stiff upper lip proves little resistance to 9mm Parabellum rounds.

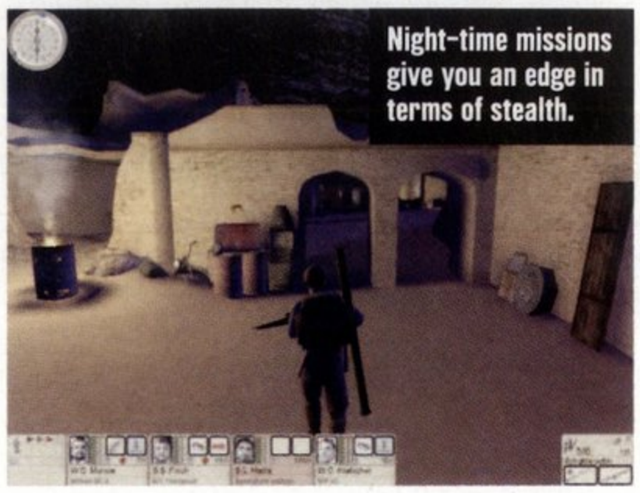
Submarine life. Good if you want to sink ships. Bad if you don't like hammocks.
Serg. Harris
S.S. Muncie
corp. Jenkins
corp. Kratochvil
32/1

BE BRIEF

Generally the presentation of *H&D2* is considerably superior to the original game. Voiceovers are generally top class, and the script – while minimal – is hardly embarrassing, though it has a tendency to keep the swearing amusingly PG-rated. Mouths like trenches are conspicuous by their absence. The briefings are especially well done, with a suitably big English voice.

PRIDE will kill you, if you let it. This has never been truer than with *Hidden & Dangerous 2*. I found my four men crouched in a crater in the middle of a minefield *in the middle of the Sahara desert*, being dive-bombed repeatedly by a persistent Stuka. I did this while hiding from a tank, hoping to get behind it to take it out with a bazooka. Except it immediately becomes clear that the dive-bombing plane is giving away my position, since the armoured vehicle rolls right up and crushes my prime Commandos beneath its big iron tracks.

At this point I decided it was probably best to turn down a gear and play at a lower difficulty level. Yes: pride will kill you, through its chosen proxy of Nazis.



So this is my advice to you, possible devourer of this epic World War II adventure: do not let pride mess with you. If, upon completing the first couple of levels, you're finding progress laborious, go back and restart the game at a lower difficulty level. Don't be ashamed if this ends up being 'Easy'. *H&D2* is a tactical game that works best when you're putting plans into action, and have time to consider and scheme, rather than repeatedly quick-loading to try and force your way past a spot. Which isn't to say that there's not going to be a degree of trial-and-error in some sections, especially when you get overconfident or impatient (see: pride messing with you again), but it's a question of balance. If you're not enjoying this game, something's wrong and you should admit it.

"This is war, this is hard, there *will* be casualties."

Then again, admitting something's wrong and then either enduring it or working your way around has *always* been part of the *Hidden & Dangerous* experience. The first game was historical, in all manner of ways. It took the unenviable title of Most Buggy Game Of All Time Still Worth Playing. On a more positive note, it was also the original founder of the soldier sim and the confirmer of World-War-II-as-game-setting, whose era of dominance – by my calculations – we lie slightly past the apex of. *Special Ops* came first, *Rainbow Six* was interesting, but it took the epic scale of Illusion's debut game to really show what was possible. On the WWII front, *Commandos* got there earlier, but was far more of a straight puzzle game rather than the grand Saturday matinee movie that was *Hidden & Dangerous*.

Good news/bad news. On the side of the angels, *Hidden & Dangerous 2* isn't anywhere near as bad as the first game in terms of bugs. For example, I never once became intangible and plummeted through all existence. However... well, yet again Illusion's aim has outreached their grasp. One useable definition of good AI for the purposes of games is that you simply never

"Either the English have invented rocket-jets a few years early, or we are in trouble."

TACTICAL MODE

A brief guide to the tactical view. Press Space and...

A) First, you go to a third-person view. You can control up and down to get high above the battle.

B) However, you'll want to click this to speed up your action.

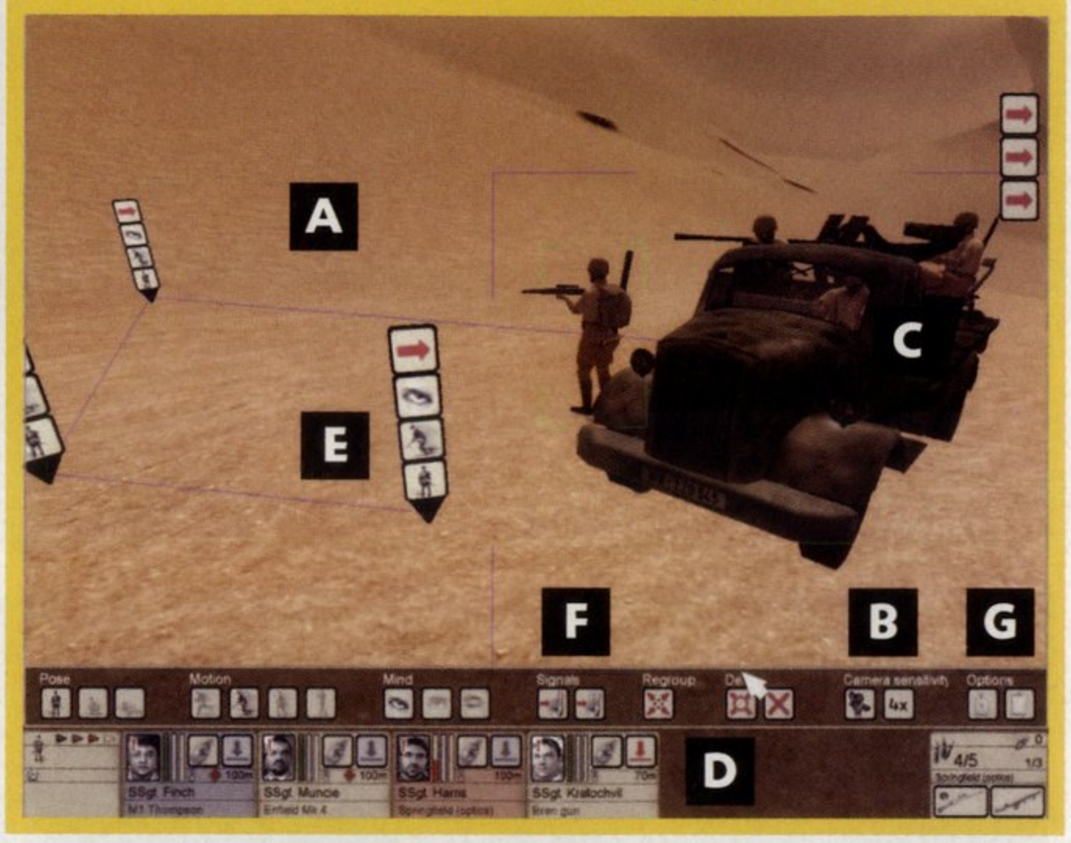
C) Your men, plus anyone you see, are on the map.

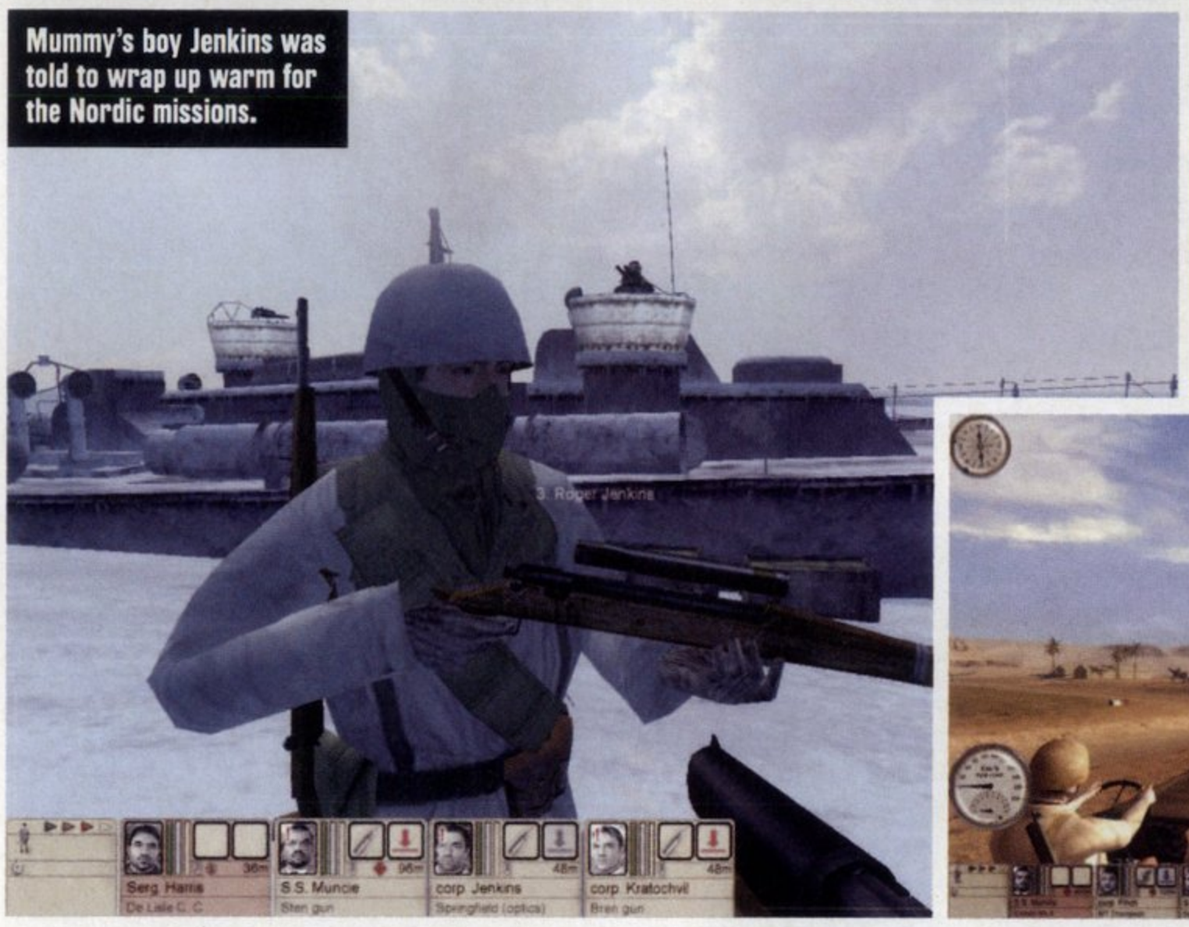
D) Now simply click here to select how you want them to walk and what speed.

E) And then click a waypoint to set the directions.

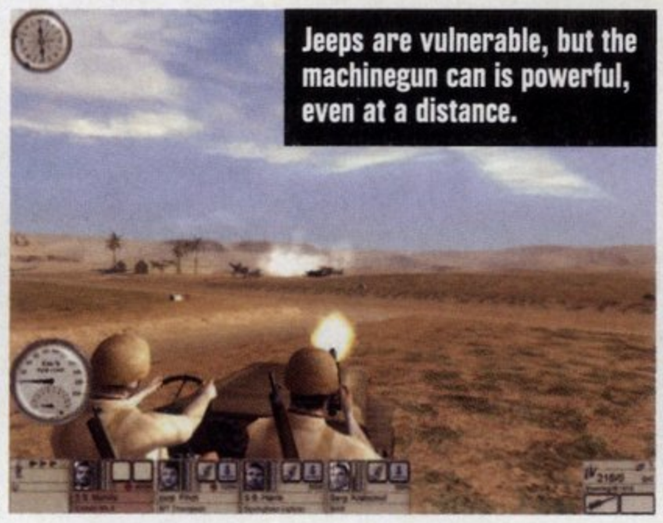
F) To co-ordinate actions, you can put signals options in order, which delay the next action until you give the hand action in-game.

G) And then you skip back with the space bar to set everything into action. Or, press this to turn from pause time to real time, allowing you to watch up here.





Mummy's boy Jenkins was told to wrap up warm for the Nordic missions.



Jeeps are vulnerable, but the machinegun can is powerful, even at a distance.

Jungle missions mean cool hats. Go to the jungle, quickly.

notice it. People just act like people should. Here, all too often you'll find your team-mates fail in this, crawling against walls or getting confused by ladders. Mostly this appears to be the fault of the powerful and sophisticated command system, causing erroneous and odd actions. But fairly often it's just bad pathfinding.

Your enemies are less noticeably implausible in their actions, but are still prone to bouts of visible twitchiness and have a tendency to respond in an unrealistically clear-minded way to surprise. Overall there's a distinct AI improvement over the original, with alerted enemies creeping around buildings rather than storming around like idiots; nevertheless, the changes are not as wholesale as they should be in this modern age.

So: difficulty level occasionally nightmarish. Twitchy AI. The reports from the frontline don't seem too positive, do they? Well, true, but prepare yourself for the counter-attack. *Hidden & Dangerous 2*'s greatest weakness, that it attempts so much, is also its greatest strength. I was honestly worried that in the four years since the original game every possible set-piece of WWII had been used, and that since the original's major kick had been the thrill of the unexpected, the sequel would suffer. I needn't have worried. Every other WWII soldier sim is shallow, limited and inauthentic compared to *H&D2*. Where its action sequences are similar to those portrayed in other games, *H&D2* makes them unique just through maximalist approach alone.

"It's best not to get *too* attached to anyone..."

It's difficult to predict what's going to come next. Some levels have a touch of *Thief* about them. Some sections share something with *Hitman*. There are missions straight out of a standard FPS, but amped up to a ludicrous degree. And, best of all, there are squad-based missions which can only belong to *Hidden & Dangerous*.

Most of the problems, as I've hinted, are about the degree of freedom you get. While the core experience remains from *H&D*, a degree of streamlining has taken place. For example, before starting on a campaign you can simply autoselect staff and equipment as before, or select each trooper's load-out with a profile like 'sniper' or 'machinegunner'. Or – for the real connoisseur – you can select every piece of period weaponry for every individually chosen man, each with their own statistics.

As in the original game, if a team-member dies that's it, they're dead forever. Keep them alive, however, and they slowly acquire improved statistics and service medals to show off to the grandkids. The emphasis is on the word continued over

MULTI-PLAYER

Rather than the simple co-op of the original, *H&D* offers three separate modes. Deathmatch and Occupation maps are standard, but the objective maps – where both sides compete to complete *H&D* style objectives – are fairly innovative. A little slower paced than most of the competitors, it'll find a home when there are not enough people to play *Battlefield 1942* or similar.

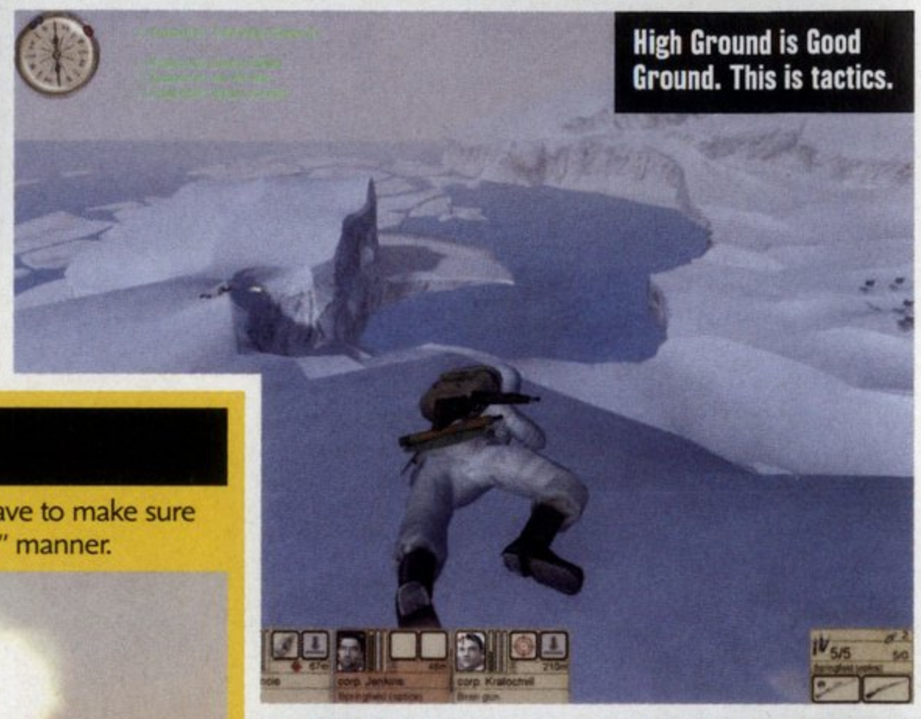
The swimsuit is good for swimming and – less handily – waddling.

SYSTEM MISER

How *Hidden & Dangerous 2* will play on *your* PC

- Supported resolutions: **640x480 to 1280x960**
- Scaleable options: **Anti-aliasing, triple buffer, 16/32-bit colour, texture size, compression, true colour, shadows, morphing, footprints, bloodstains, grass, dynamics**

VERDICT: **Hefty, but not too hefty. On the recommended specs, it runs admirably. There are lots of ways to scale it down too, so you should get a fluid game even on a relatively low spec. And, being a tactical game, even if it's a tad slow you can always focus on the planning rather than the action sections, allowing the AI to cover for your inadequate reflexes.**



High Ground is Good Ground. This is tactics.

DRESSING FOR SUCCESS

One of the biggest changes is the in-game disguise system, which now assists immensely with stealth. You have to make sure the uniform matches completely though – an SAS backpack will ruin the effect in a "Going on holiday, Hans?" manner.

To get hold of a uniform you have to make an enemy surrender, by means of frightening the life out of them. In some missions you already have your disguise. Then you can sneak. Like so.

As in *Thief*, *Commandos* and *Hitman*, you're able to move bodies around once you've killed them. Which is probably a good idea if you don't want to be discovered.

It's important to remember that no disguise is perfect. A status bar decays the longer you're in the enemy's line of sight, so try to remain unsuspicious. Blowing up tanks isn't.

Trees are a little fake looking. This is because this is a videogame.

'slowly', however, and at the end of the day it's best not to get *too* attached to anybody. This is war, this is hard, and there will be casualties. Unless you're saving and loading to an unfashionable degree.

And, again as with the original, this is a game where you genuinely appreciate the developers' painstaking attention to detail. Every weapon has its own feel as well as its own theatre of expertise – just as it should. The vehicles now perform more realistically than before, and there are far more of them at large than before: aircraft, half-tracks, and those bowel-looseningly scary, all-conquering tanks. And there's none of that pointing a panzerfaust randomly at some part of a tank's anatomy and firing here, either. Illusion Softworks' faithful rendition of tank armour means that these beasts are all but soldier-proof, unless you hit them in the rear where the armour is thinnest. The more plausible the challenge, the greater the emotional payoff when you succeed. (And a free hint for you here: take a couple of bazookas on the desert missions.) The

"Every other soldier sim is shallow and limited..."

planes may not be quite so convincing, but they feel pretty damn real when screaming towards you in combat, take my word for it. Atmosphere. This game has it.

Will you control your men directly, possessing them at your whim? Or will you retreat to the lofty viewpoint of the tactical map, and place waypoints? Individual, or group action? The choice is always yours. The new tiered menu command system means that team control is harder to learn this time around, and more confusing, but only because it has become more powerful and more sophisticated. Once you've got the hang of it, you're able to control the tactical dimension of your game to a massive degree.

As already noted, this is not a fault-free game. Given that it sets out to be the WWII game that gives you everything – from desert warfare to jungle, from tactical play and stealth missions to explicit in-your-face man-tank action – these faults are worth living with. Think you're too good for an imperfect game, however grand its ambitions? That's just pride talking.

KIERON GILLEN

PCGA PROFILE

H&D 2 is:
- **The definitive, serious WWII game**
- **Squad-based**
- **Imaginative**

H&D 2 is not:
- **Free of niggles**
- **To be played in the manner of *Medal of Honour***
- **Easy. No, really**

■ Publisher **Gathering** ■ Developer **Illusion Softworks** ■ Minimum System **PIII 1GHz, 128Mb RAM, 2.4Gb HD space, 32Mb 3D card** ■ Recommended **P4 2GHz, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **Internet, LAN, up to 16** ■ Web Address **www.hidden-and-dangerous.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Call of Duty
If you want something a little more arcade-styled, look here for polished FPS action.

Operation Flashpoint
Conversely, if you want something even more expansive, consider *Flashpoint*.

PC GAMES addict

Militaristic, squad-based action adventure, on an epic scale.

88%

GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

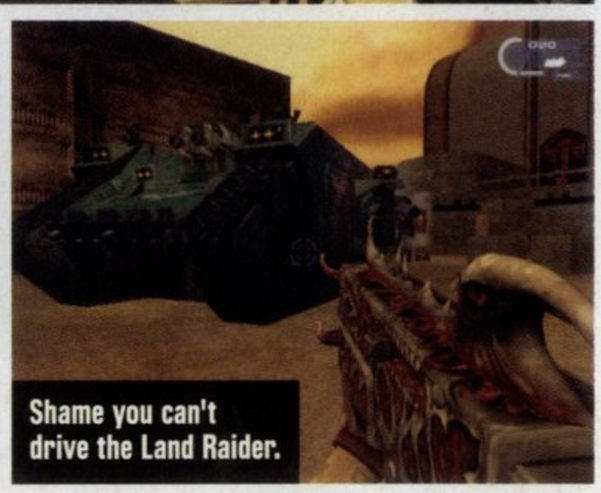
WARHAMMER 40,000 FIRE WARRIOR

The men of metal get a makeover. And not a funny-looking dice in sight.

These Chaos Marines are tough cookies. Go for a headshot to put 'em down.

"Dance, my puppet! Dance to the song of my Burst Cannon! Mwahaha!"

The Plasma Gun: an armour-melting behemoth.



Shame you can't drive the Land Raider.

VOICES OF FIRE

Kuju have gone to town on the voice acting, and *Fire Warrior* features some stars of classic UK sci-fi, as well as a few surprises. Tom Baker's inclusion is most pleasing, as is Sean Pertwee's. Burt Kwouk plays your mentor Lusha, while the ever-appealing bluster of Brian Blessed provides the voice of an Imperial Admiral.

PCGA PROFILE

Fire Warrior is:
- Clanking
- Decent
- A bit clumsy

Fire Warrior is not:
- Amazing
- Particularly complicated
- Halo

THIS whole cross-platform release thing... it can't be good for us. PS2 games are best when they're developed specifically for the PS2, and the same goes for Xbox, Gamecube and PC titles. There seems to be at least one cross-platformer a month at the moment, and the likes of *Judge Dredd* and *Mace Griffin* really are jacks of all trades, and masters of none.

FPS *Fire Warrior* falls straight into this category, with the resounding thud of a man in two-ton power-assisted armour. It feels like you're playing a console game from the word go, especially if you're a committed PC gamer, as it is on our platform that the first-person shooter has been honed over the last decade by the likes of id and Epic.

The first thing you notice is a mouse-sensitivity issue. Crisp mouse reaction is what you want with an FPS, and *Fire Warrior* doesn't quite have it. There seems to be an in-built acceleration element to mouse travel – no doubt a hangover from the game's joypad-centric development. The net result is a sense of clumsiness, as incremental direction-changes take more mouse movement than they should, and notching up the sensitivity merely leaves you swinging your gun in wild arcs. Not a game-killer by any means, merely irritating, and for the most part, it's one of those things you can become accustomed to for the sake of the game.

Which, for the most part, isn't bad. If you're up on your Warhammer 40,000 background, then this shooter will appeal to you most of all, as it's packed to the bulkheads with the iconography, technology, weapons and armies of the tabletop sci-fi war game, all recreated in excellent detail. If that's not your bag then the fiction is still pleasing enough. You play the part of a young Tau alien facing his trial by fire. Time to board human ships and fight across human-dominated worlds to rescue your kidnapped leader.

"Fire Warrior excels in the weapons department."

Graphically, it's quite reasonable, with some nice architectural design, although character models are generally blocky – another nod at *Fire Warrior*'s console origins. Where it excels is in the weapons department, as a 40K game should. There's a massive variety of futuristic gunnery, and the *Halo*-inspired mechanic of only allowing you to carry two at any one time works perfectly, as you're always forced to be critical with your selection.

Other than this, it's a pretty average FPS – you get your snipey bits, your missile-throwing bits and your spray-the-area-with-bullets bits. It's without a doubt the best Games Workshop-inspired game out there, and if that stands you to attention, *Fire Warrior* will entertain. But critical FPS players who prefer designer originals over generic clobber will be left wanting.

AL BICKHAM

■ Publisher **THQ** ■ Developer **Kuju** ■ Minimum System **PIII 800, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card** ■ Recommended **PIII 1.2GHz, 256Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **Internet (broadband only), up to eight players** ■ Web Address **www.firewarrior.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Call Of Duty
Superior squad-based World War Two combat. Great AI.

Halo
Sci-fi shooter par excellence (and the inspiration for *Fire Warrior*'s two-gun bit).

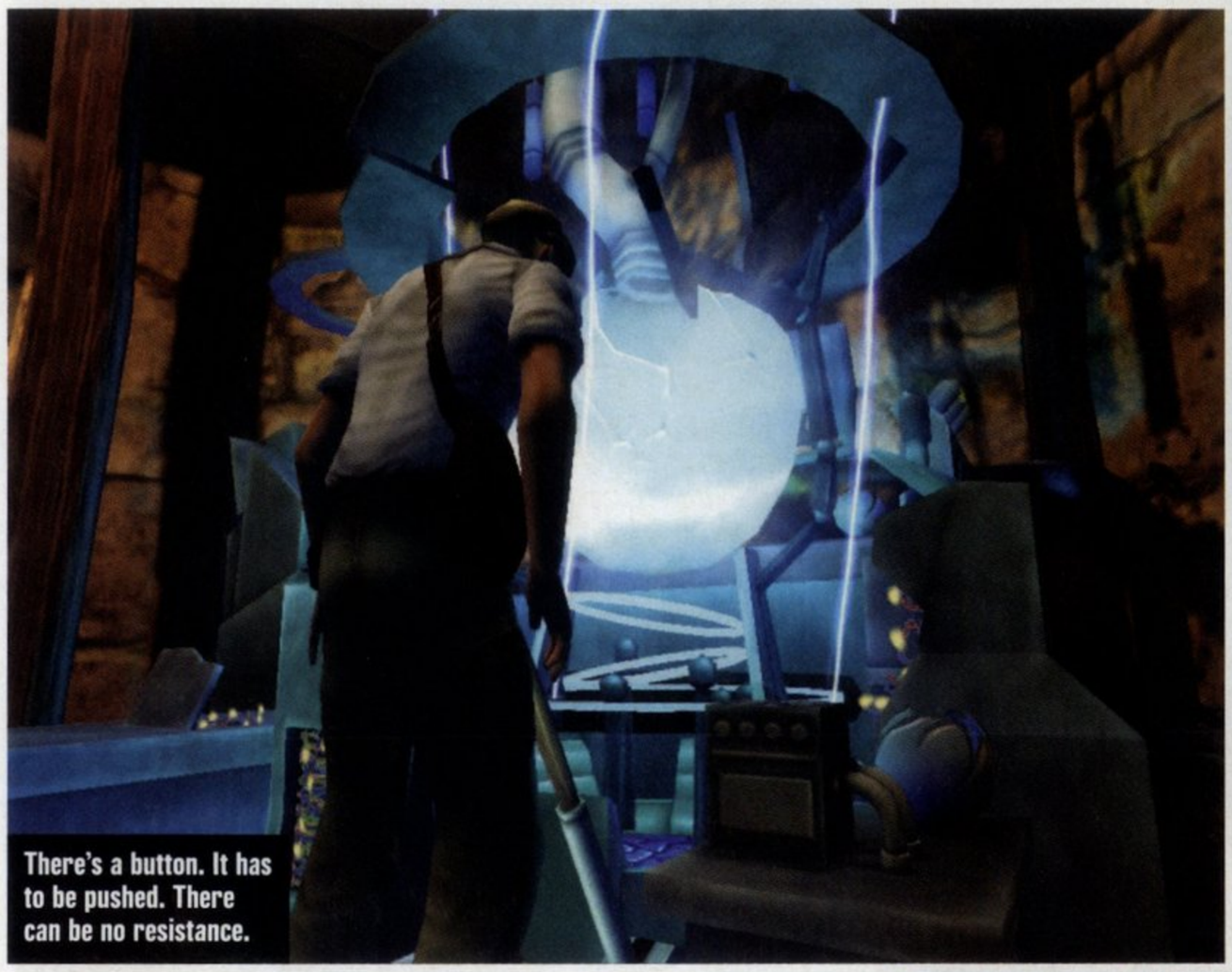
PC GAMES addict
A decent-enough first-person shooter, but the PC isn't its natural home.

71%

GENRE: ADVENTURE

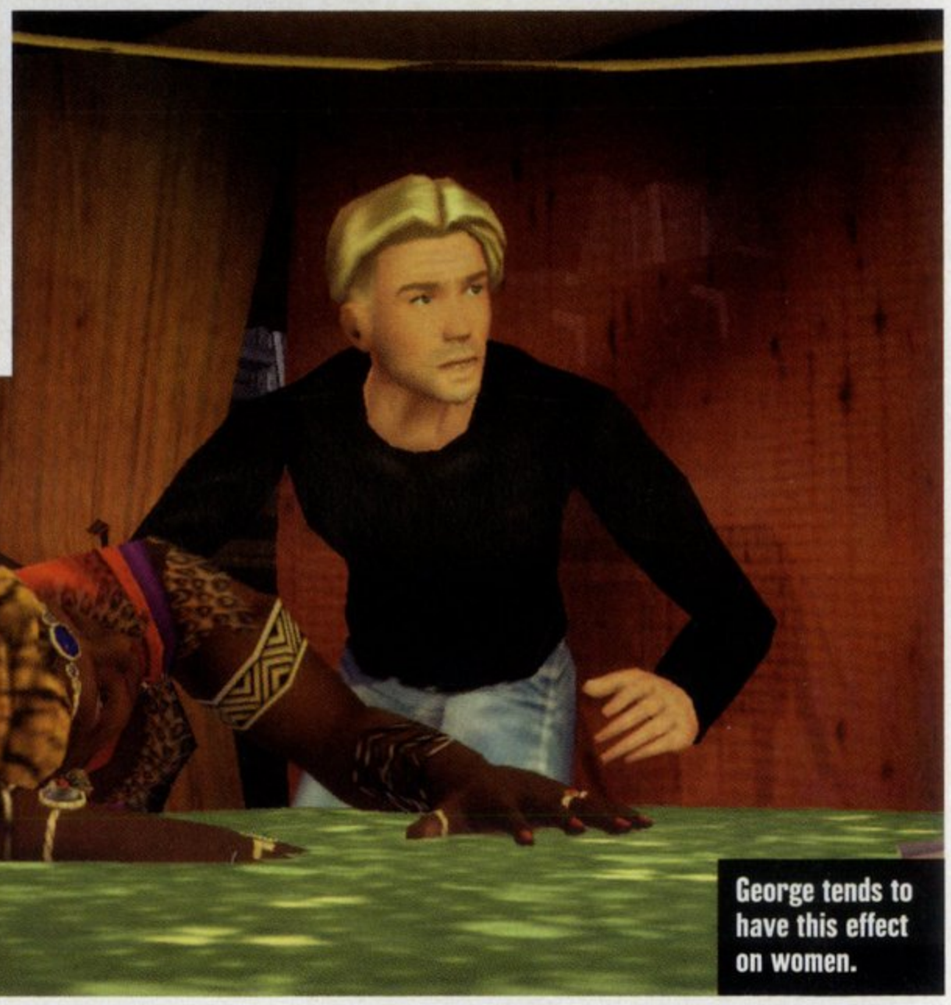
BROKEN SWORD
THE SLEEPING DRAGON

Beware: here be Dragon Power.



There's a button. It has to be pushed. There can be no resistance.

Susarro – the main baddie for this third game.



George tends to have this effect on women.

SAY JEEZ

At times brilliant, and at others, infuriating, the camera is at once one of the strongest and weakest parts of the game. Capable of evoking sizzling ambience during certain scenes, but also managing to make running down a corridor a complicated challenge. The problem is the camera switches to face in opposite directions at each corner. Happily, the view is good more often than it's bad. But when it's bad it's naughty indeed.

IT'S time to start over. For too long, amateur diagnosis of the adventure genre's health has impeded any helpful discussion about what treatments might actually improve it. This static analysis has held back progress for the worst part of a decade. But for the last six years, a cure for adventure gaming's ills has been bubbling away in the head of one of its godfathers – a man with faith in the genre he helped create, but also with the foresight and clarity of mind to see how the genre must change to survive.

Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon is the first of the new wave; part of a fresh generation of adventure games which seek to make the genre contemporary, and restore narrative as an important part of modern gaming. It's the death of point-and-click, and the rebirth of story-telling. *The Sleeping Dragon* is not perfect; it's not even the greatest adventure game you'll ever play, but it's the giant leap that the genre so desperately needed. But this sounds like a concluding paragraph, and there's much to be explored first.

Broken Sword began in 1996, issuing from the keyboard of veteran adventure writer Charles Cecil. *Broken Sword I* and *II*'s interest lay in telling a tale. In terms of historical flavour, volume of information, and passion for its themes, it's hard to think of any game in any genre that has come close to matching the experience. A traditional mid-'90s point-and-clicker, *Broken Sword*'s uniqueness lay in the complexity of the player characters – George and Nico. George Stobbart, an American patent lawyer, is bolshy. His approach is direct, sometimes foolish, and always impassioned. Nico Collard, a French newspaper journalist, is George's opposite – strict, polite, and business-headed. Where George would be prepared to believe in mystical beasts, Nico attempts a more level-headed approach. Together, and sometimes far apart, they have uncovered elaborate plots dating back over thousands of years, and saved the world from ancient magics.

"Here, 3D has finally been done properly."

Which brings us up to date. A new child has been born – the 3D adventure.

Yes, of course, LucasArts did this in 1998 with *Grim Fandango*, and then again in 2000 with *Escape From Monkey Island*. But now, with the aid of hindsight, and at last something to compare those titles with, the opaque benefits of introducing a third dimension to adventure gaming have at last become very clear. With *BS: The Sleeping Dragon*, it's finally been done properly, thank goodness.

LucasArts' mistake was to try to force an adventure game to become 3D. Cecil's success is to make a 3D game become an adventure. Using a significantly modified Renderware engine, George and Nico now exist in a world with not only left, right, in and out, but also up, down, over, under and around. No longer do you choose 'use' and click on the wall to scale it. Now you explore the wall, find a section low enough to reach for, and pull yourself up. And if there's no such section, you rearrange the scenery until you've built one. The game's furniture has become a key part of completing a puzzle, and happily pinches ideas from some of the best third-person action games along the way. When swinging from ledges, memories of that other tomb raider are never far away.

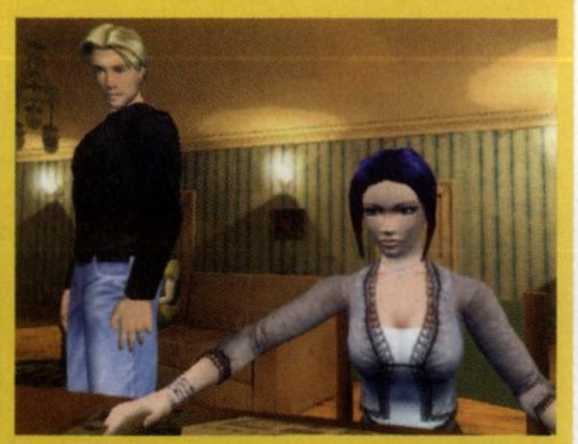
HEY, GOOD LOOKING

At one point, Nico indicates that George should look to his right by biting her bottom lip, rolling her eyes to one side, and nudging her head, at a slight angle, a couple of times. A perfect execution of the classic "quick, look over there" head-gesture. In stills, we can do it no justice, but here are a few other examples of just how emotive a face can be in-game. Of course, Nico does have the unfair advantage of being French.

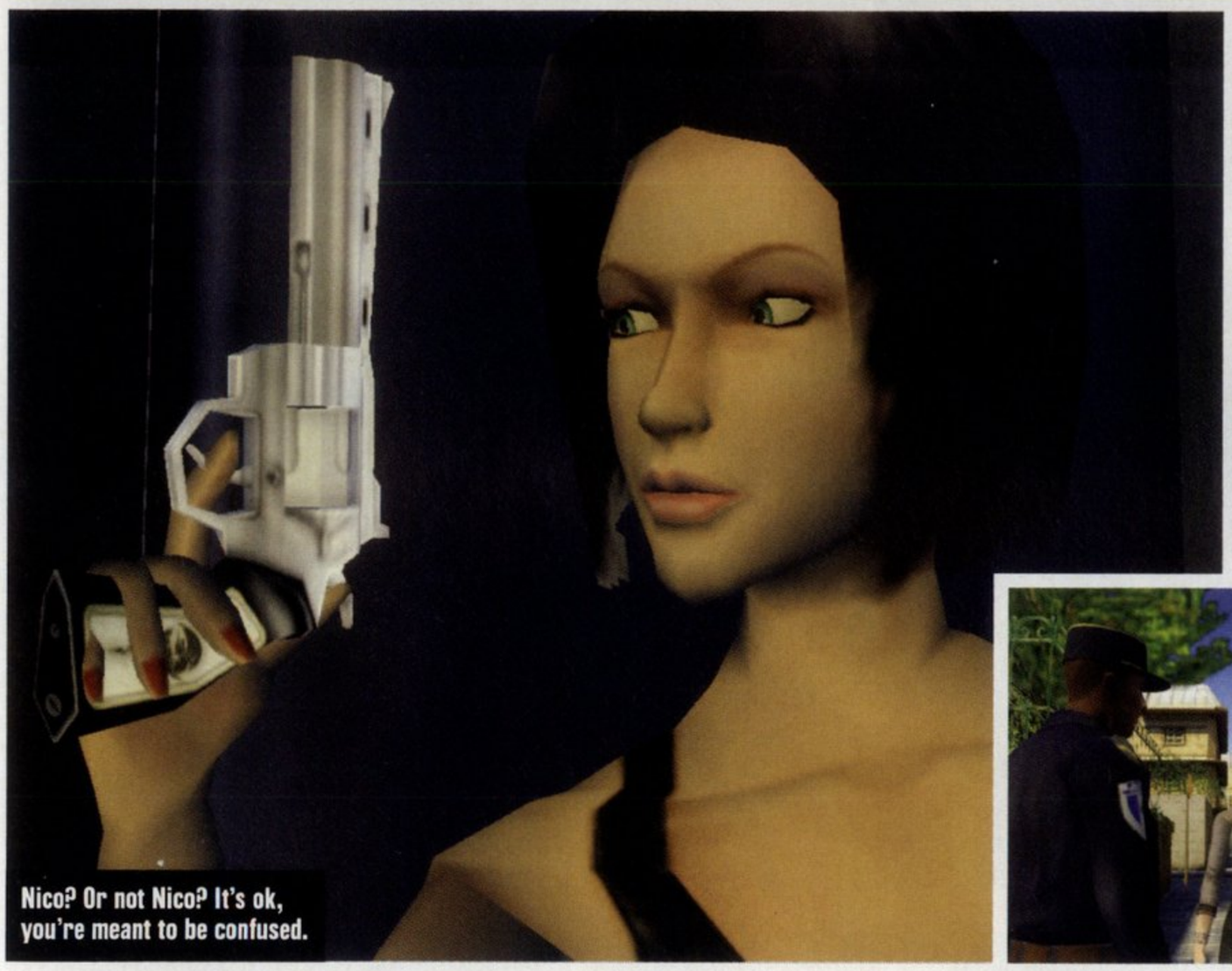
Nico's face at rest, while she listens to someone on the phone. Yet she still has that 'listening' look.

A professionally executed grimace. The lips disgruntled, the nostrils flared, eyes slit-like. Someone's in trouble.

Fantastically subtle here. Eyebrows turned down: she's scheming. Slight up-turn on the corners of her mouth: it's a crafty scheme.



Lips pursed, ignoring people around her, grim determination. It's a thinking look. A *thinking* look. Impressive.



Nico? Or not Nico? It's ok, you're meant to be confused.

She seems to like him.

Your Aussie pilot friend offers a great Congo taxi service.

Awoken

And it is at this point that the purists could start screaming. It's bad enough that this review talks about '90s point-and-clicking as a thing of the past, but to boast about the 'action' elements of the game before the story gets a proper mention? Happily, though, it's our great pleasure to say that purists and long-term lovers of the series have nothing to worry about.

So that we can swiftly move on to the more important features, let's get this sorted as quickly as possible. When LucasArts introduced their z-axis, removing the mouse was unnecessary and unhelpful. In *The Sleeping Dragon*, a mouse would only hinder your freedom. Wisely, Revolution have 'borrowed' the head-turning idea from their rivals, so that you can look at an object or item when you can do something with it. But, and oh-so-importantly *but*, the interactive area is also flagged by a glinting star when approached. There is no doubt about what you should notice, and no need for the bane of the genre: sweeping the screen for the correct interactive pixel to click on. But instead of *Grim Fandango*'s anonymous 'use' key, *Sleeping Dragon* uses a four-button display, letting you choose how you wish to interact. Walk near a computer, and the 'look' and 'use' icons will appear. Approach a wooden crate, and you'll have 'push/pull' and 'climb'. Stand beneath the aforementioned ledge on a building, and 'jump' will be all that's available. So while you may be leaping Croft-like about the walls, you're doing it in the *most* traditional adventure ways. It's genius. It actually works.

Thank goodness that's out of the way and everyone's convinced. Moving on. A few years have gone by, and George and Nico have drifted out of contact, if not from each other's minds. (Nico's apartment not only sports a photo of George on the table, but a painting of a goat is hung on the wall, not because she likes it, but because George bought it for her.) George is on the trail of a client who wishes to patent a perpetual energy machine, somewhere in the Congo. Nico is following up a story about a computer hacker who claims to have cracked an ancient Mayan code. And naturally, things go immediately awry for both. George ends up stranded in the jungle, only to witness the man he came to help being killed. And a stranger looking suspiciously like Nico continued over

CONTROLS FREAK

Thanks to the cross-platform nature of this release, controls are either keyboard or gamepad. Both work brilliantly, the keyboard's WASD keys stepping in for the gamepad's four buttons, with movement on the cursors or D-pad. Gamepad-wise, there is definitely something nice about being able to lean back, away from the desk, and play a little more informally.

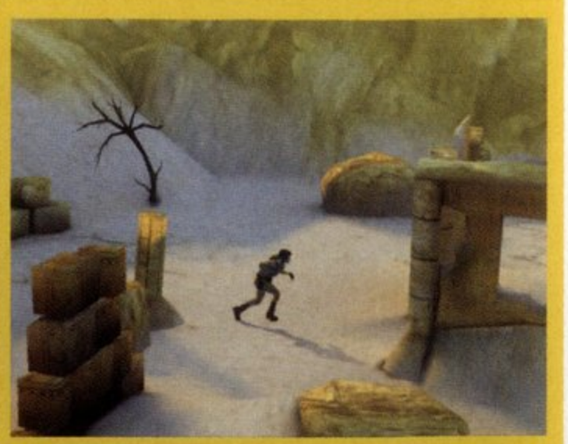
WORLD WARY

George and Nico have always enjoyed adventures that span the entire globe, and needless to say this hasn't changed in their latest outing. Below are some of the stops on their tour. Just think of the Air Miles those two must accumulate.

Paris, the traditional starting point. Nico takes a slightly less conventional route to visit a friend.

Green hills and blue skies. Yes, it's somewhere in the South West of England. Somewhere mystical. You figure it out.

Prague, at the entrance to an impressive castle. Nico weaves her womanly spell, while George keeps well out of the way.



Egypt. Something looks so very familiar here. What is it..? No, it must just be déjà vu. Weird, though. Hmm.

George and Nico play Indy and Lara. Those crazy mixed-up kids.

Nico's apartment, sporting her new and exciting DVD player, no less.

SPEECH! SPEECH!

George is once again voiced by Rolf Saxon, who is on his usual fine form. His timing is often beautiful, making good jokes brilliant. But Nico is now voiced by Sarah Crook, whose gentle French accent (adopted) better portrays the softer, more humorous evolution of the character. The two work very well together, and the middle act contains some truly impressive comedic banter.

assassinates the hacker when he shows her the code. The two stories inevitably intertwine, as the two learn they're investigating the same case.

The case in question is the culmination of the series, the climax of the mysteries of the Templars told in the first *Broken Sword*, and the Mayan predictions explored in the second. It's about a mysterious earth energy known as the Dragon Power, which a nefarious crew is attempting to harness for their even more nefarious aims. And this is where the first real criticism can be levelled. The game is designed to be completely accessible to a new player. The idea is that there's no need to know the story of parts one and two. But this isn't strictly true. There are innumerable references to the history of the series, from recurring characters (to identify them would be to spoil *far* too many surprises), to comments made frequently in conversation and descriptions. To the uninitiated, this could occasionally be a little mystifying. But the attempts to make it universally understandable also mean that I never really felt my teeth had completely sunk into the story. A noticeable reduction in dialogue, and no scenes to match the museums in the previous titles (pages and pages of information to read), mean that things can seem a little shallow at times. Much more could have been said about the various conspiracies and mysteries involved.

Remember Flap? No? For Nico it all seems to be flooding back.

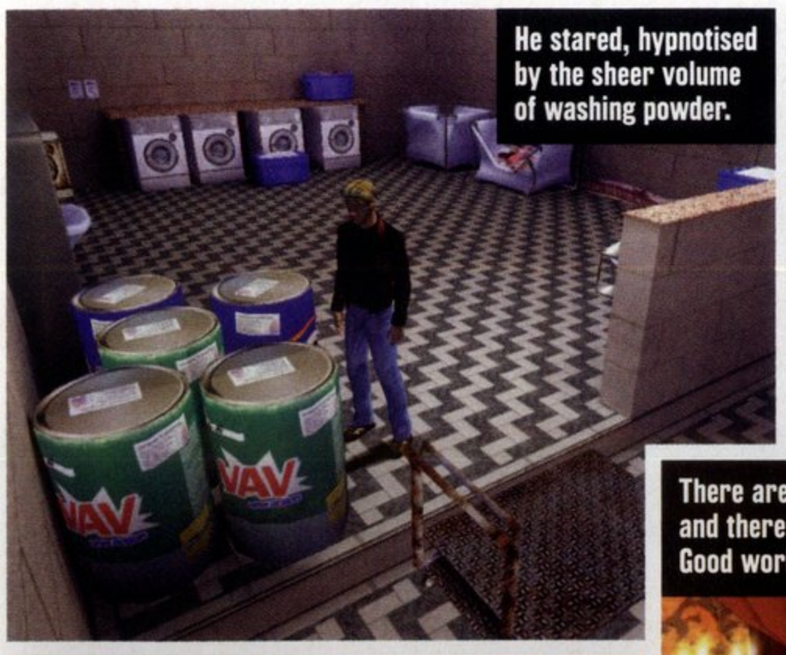
"At points I found myself clapping at the jokes."

Obviously a huge amount rides on the quality of the puzzles, and it's here that the other major gripe appears. It feels as though too much has been compromised to find a new audience. Objects required to solve challenges can often be found about 30 seconds before they're needed. A seasoned adventurer will be able to spot the object's purpose the instant they pick it up, creating an occasionally frustrating sense of inevitability. But the main issue is the crates. Damned crates. Although the puzzles are generally well crafted and neatly executed, the number of times George finds himself needing to rearrange boxes in order to progress provokes louder and louder groans of "oh no, not AGAIN!"

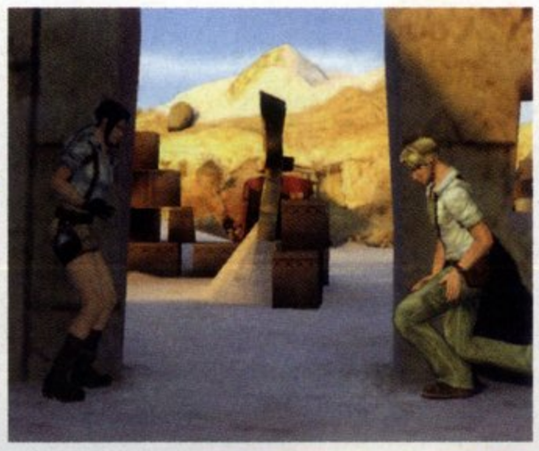
Simply put, there's no goat puzzle here. So while they aren't all painfully easy, they are never brain-hurtingly challenging. It wasn't obvious to me until now, but getting stuck is something you actually miss... Until, that is, you encounter one of the two arcade sequences.

They really shouldn't be there. Fortunately, Revolution have recognised how these tests will upset gamers who aren't interested in flexing their reflexes. After a few failed attempts, the difficulty level automatically drops to a point where you can't fail to progress. This is an excellent idea, and makes the game playable by all-comers. But just dropping the action bits would have made a lot more sense, and the flow does suffer because of them.

But the strengths – oh there are many. Though stunted, the story is still proper *Broken Sword* stuff – ancient manuscripts, mysterious cloaked strangers, secret

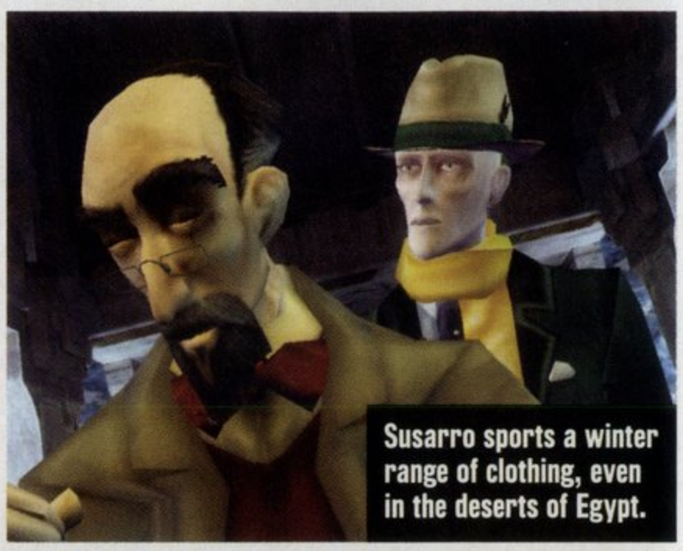


He stared, hypnotised by the sheer volume of washing powder.



Two of the finest arses in gaming history.

There are medallions, and there are *medallions*. Good work that man.



Susarro sports a winter range of clothing, even in the deserts of Egypt.

SYSTEM MISER

How *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* will play on *your* PC

■ Supported resolutions: **800x600, 1024x768, 1280x1024** ■ Scaleable options: **Colour depth**

VERDICT: **While the minimum system asks for a PIII 750, it seems that with a 64Mb 3D card, this can drop as low as a PIII 500. Match or improve upon the minimum, and you're going to be breezing through, the graphics immensely smooth, and the load times invisible. This is all thanks to a greatly tweaked Renderware engine, probably the best we've seen it implemented.**

EYE YOUR CAST ON THIS

Always known for their elaborate cast of characters, the *Broken Sword* games always enjoy a mixture of old favourites and new chums. So as not to spoil the surprise for the old guard, these are some of our favourite newbies.

Petra. This insane white-blonde appears throughout, determined to finish off our intrepid heroes. Brilliantly sadistic.

George's new friend Harry, an insane, drunken Australian taxi driver/amateur pilot, offers help just when it's needed.

The new police inspector, seemingly having replaced the wannabe psychic of games past. Suspicious, and unhelpful.

The angriest Scottish chef in the world. A favourite minor character – fantastically funny, and so very, very angry.

underground temples, rival love-interests, ridiculous stereotypes, globe-trotting exploration (including Paris, the Congo, the south-west of England and Prague, among others), all present and delightful.

The development of the relationship between the central characters is perhaps the strongest point, Nico having softened to George's silliness, and George sometimes having to take things more seriously. Their banter is so finely written and so brilliantly acted that at points I found myself clapping at the jokes, especially when Nico joins in with George's silly comments. And this goes further than the funnies – at points, slightly embarrassingly, eyes became wet. So touching are two key moments that this reviewer's hands left the keyboard and went to cover his mouth in surprise. And this is achieved not only through the quality of script and acting, but also the extraordinary facial expressions that the in-game engine can generate (see 'Hey, Good-Looking').

Graphically, it's beautiful. The state-of-the-art lighting means that shadows lie perfectly across awkward surfaces, and scenes often have a film noir feel. Although the cartoony look has been abandoned, the visuals still feel essentially *Broken Sword*-ish, the backgrounds lovingly crafted. And events are viewed via a mostly extremely effective camera (see 'Say Jeez'). Lip-syncing is mostly bang-on, complementing facial expressions, and doing justice to the quality of the voices.

And the music – as has been the standard throughout the series – is wonderful and reactive.

Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon has managed what some have thought impossible, and others have failed to do: it has reinvented the genre. Without forcing you to buy and play it, there's no real way to convey how different it feels to play, and yet how true to the core spirit of adventure gaming it is.

A lot of love has gone into making this game, and that passion pays off through the script, the design, and atmosphere. It's flawed, like every other adventure game, but in terms of being told a story, there's no need to look anywhere else.

JOHN WALKER

PCGA PROFILE

Broken Sword: TSD is:

- **Wonderfully acted**
- **Trilogy completing**
- **Lacking depth**

Broken Sword: TSD is not:

- **Point-and-click**
- **Old fashioned**
- **Spoiled by action**

■ Publisher **THQ** ■ Developer **Revolution** ■ Minimum System **PIII 750, 128Mb RAM, 1 Gb HD space, 64Mb 3D card** ■ Recommended **PIII 1.2GHZ, 256Mb RAM** ■ Multi-Player **None**
■ Web Address **www.revolution.co.uk** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Grim Fandango
One of the greatest adventure games of all time, if not possessing the best 3D engine.

Broken Sword I & II
Both available dirt-cheap, and still most definitely worth playing.

PC GAMES addict

The rebirth of a genre. A beautiful story, told in a brand new way.

87%

GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY

EMPIRES
DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

Another little bit of history repeating.

Empires has some genuinely excellent effects in it, most notably the great animated water.

That whooshing sound you hear is historical accuracy flying straight out of the door.

"What you mean, Chon forget picnic basket?"

AGE AFTER AGE

To save us all some time, please cut out and keep this margin note and keep it for the next *Age of Empires* type game we review. Right. Here we go: You, village, old, primitive, useless, build, food, yum-yum, enemies, inventors, guns, Age Advance! Better guns, repeat, Age Advance! Best guns, bang, bang, enemies die, build wonder, hip, hip, hurray, game over! And that's about it.

ON the offchance that you've never played an *Age of Empires* style strategy title, please refer to the guide on the left. Suffice it to say that *Empires* – and really, the title itself pretty much tells you what lies on the two silver CD platters in the box – follows the classic mix of empire-building and RTS down to almost the last letter. The big twist is that while the average *AOE*-style game keeps its forces much the same, with the occasional tweak to give the English particularly good archers or the Russians a 20% production bonus, each and every empire on offer here is massively different.

Right from the start, the English find themselves able to focus on expansion, courtesy of Food Warehouses which save them the task of foraging for supplies, and the Mason's Guild which automatically builds any structures that you require. Simply start construction, and your drones can buzz off and do something more useful with their time – such as putting up lethal Spike Pits to skewer any incoming cavalry. By contrast, the Chinese have to do everything by hand, but get to do so with mobile Town Centres and War Camps, and a more spiritual outlook on warfare. When battle kicks off, the English may have powerful longbowmen and orange-bearded Highlanders to call on, but that's not much use if the enemy has driven into the middle of your base, its weakest citizens constructing siege weapons with their bare hands and spinning your skies into violent monsoons. The Koreans have a similar outlook, with a mixture of Zen mysticism and fiery, if primitive technology. And the French smell like poo. Poo with the pox. (Unless you're French, in which case, those Germans, eh?)

"The most deranged battles I've ever seen..."

These differences – and we're just scratching the surface here – are in stark contrast to the normally highly linear progression of most *AOE*-type games. Typically, you kick off with a couple of grunts, slowly advance towards horses, then onto basic siege equipment, and finally take to the skies with fighter jets and bombers. Here, the Chinese have access to rock-throwing War Kites almost from the off, with everyone else stuck fumbling around with paper aeroplanes until World War I starts.

And then, everything changes yet again. No doubt your eyebrows raised at the list of sides. The Koreans? What are they doing in here, instead of the Germans, or even the good old USA? Well, hard to believe as it may be, the United States – while eventually a key player in both World Wars – hardly has the history required to make it from 1914 back to the Age of Gunpowder. Both empires and *Empires* change over time, forcing you to pick a new side to finish off the game: United Kingdom, Russia, Germany, France or, yes, the United States. Once again, each has their own unique units and abilities, such as the US' ability to construct the USS Enterprise – the naval one, sadly – to launch aerial attacks from anywhere in the ocean, the United Kingdom's covert Commandos and the Russians' ability to crash the Tunguska meteor anywhere they like on the map, making us wonder if some of the designers have been smoking their notes instead of

Metric

There can be only one! And his mate, Brian.

Air support is crucial.

General Patton's adventures are a walk in the park. With guns.

SYSTEM MISER

How *Empires* will play on your PC

■ Supported resolutions: **800x600, 1024x768, 1400x1050**
■ Scaleable options: **16bit/32 bit, graphics quality, model detail, hi-res animation, shadow quality, reflections**

VERDICT: When the going gets busy – and it will – Empires will thrash your machine to within an inch of its life and keep beating. The real slow-down comes from the number of models on the go at any one time. You can set lot population limits to get around this, but you miss out on a lot of the fun. Consider doubling that recommended spec instead.

HISTORY TODAY

The past. Intricate, endlessly fascinating, and distinguished by the legendary achievements of its great commanders. How do we measure up? Let's put the three *Empires* campaigns to the ultimate time test, and match them to our own modern values and deeds.

THEM: Richard the Lionheart. Fought a desperate battle for the throne and helped unite a fragmented Europe.
US: Played *Lionheart*, then deleted it and defragged our hard-drives. But Richard remains an awe-inspiring name.

THEM: Admiral Yi Sun-Sin. His orders in the defence of his native Korea earned him a place in the history books.
US: Occasionally go to that Asian takeaway down the road. Usually order a #16, #12 and a #24. With a Diet Coke.

THEM: General Patton. Besieged and took Casablanca against the odds, using only a handful of troops.
US: Returned Casablanca to the video store; forced to pay a late fee. Responded by crushing Nazi war machine.

reading them. Not that this would necessarily be a bad thing, of course.

Now for the *really* confusing part. When you change cultures, you lose access to your side's old abilities and technologies. The Russians no longer get to produce Taoist sorcerers to splatter volcanoes into enemy territory and the English have to start building like everybody else. Many buildings simply become useless – churches no longer producing Priest units, and Stables lying barren in the company of artillery guns and Tiger tanks. However, not only do you keep all your old units, they don't get automatically upgraded as your civilisation advances. This leads to some of the most deranged, impossible battles that I've ever seen, with English catapults lobbing plague-ridden cows into swarms of heavy artillery, Russians distracting enemy armies with pretty fireworks and rickety wooden ships proudly sailing next to aircraft carriers and desperately dodging lightning strikes. All together now: Okaaaaaay....

Mad as a March hare in July it may be, but this variety should keep multi-player battles humming along for a while – even if I'll be stunned not to see a few balancing problems cropping up after a while. Being able to do things like fill up your production queues, and snap everything out onto the battlefield simultaneously can lead to devastating results, and this is without trying to remember exactly what each individual unit and culture is capable of in battle.

True, you don't need to be a micromanager to play – but a leaning towards mentalism does come in handy while planning strikes. Beyond this element, we're firmly back in the realm of good old *Age of Empires*, with all that comes with it. Enough said. It's still a great game, but one that really is screaming for total revival rather sorcerous spins.

RICHARD COBBETT

PCGA PROFILE

Empires is:
■ ***Age of Empires***
■ ***Rise of Nations***
■ ***Empire Earth***

Empires is not:
■ ***Half-Life 2***
■ ***Temple of Elemental Evil***
■ ***Strip Parcheezi***

■ Publisher **Activision** ■ Developer **Stainless Steel Studios** ■ Minimum System **PIII 600MHz, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card, 1.1Gb HD** ■ Recommended **PIII 1GHz, 256Mb RAM** ■ Multi-Player **LAN, internet, up to 8 players** ■ Web Address **www.stainlesssteelstudios.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Rise of Nations
Go from Flintstone to Oppenheimer in a lunchtime with the fastest *AOE*-alike there is.

Age of Mythology
Same basic game, but with a fantastical twist, plus recent *Titans* expansion pack.

PC GAMES addict
Hyper-varied, and yet already starting to feel like yesterday's game.
81%

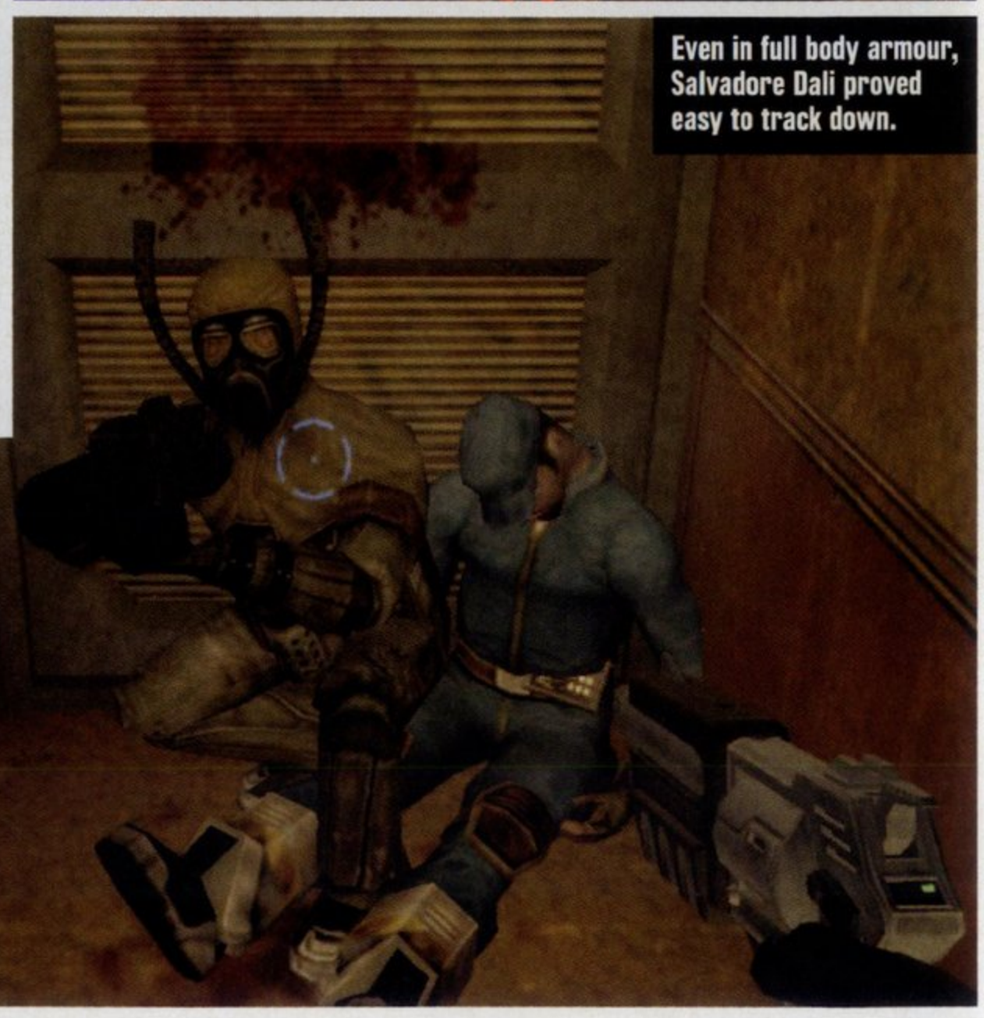
GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

MACE GRIFFIN BOUNTY HUNTER

"And Henry Rollins is doing the voice acting! That'll make it popular, right?"

Look: we've done that thing where we stick Ross Atherton's head on a game character again.

Space. Needs tidying up, frankly.



Even in full body armour, Salvadore Dali proved easy to track down.

LARGE, MEDIUM, SMALL

Another indicator of the lack of creative risk taken by the development team, or perhaps simply the lack of imaginative depth allowed by the game's brief, is the selection of standard 'alien' races. All humanoid, of course, they consist of the fast but weak reptilian types, the strong but slow larger chaps who often wear heavy armour, and the medium race, human beings. Frankly, it doesn't take much imagination to invent the bubble-drug hover-jellies or the stilt-insect trumpet-people. So why not at least try?

FIRSTLY, mediocrity is not a crime. But perhaps it should be. Secondly, words hurt no one. Sticks and stones do. But I'm not allowed to use sticks and stones. With these thoughts in mind, let us examine the case of *Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter*.

The plot is one of revenge. Mr Griffin has been harshly treated and, let's face it, he's no forgiving Christian. In fact, he's an (apparently innocent) ex-convict with the voice of noisy musical shoutist and sometime TV presenter, Henry Rollins. The setting is science fictional. It's the far future, with aliens, robots and starships aplenty. The mode of interaction with this world is twofold: Mace can shoot and press buttons, or he can fly a spaceship. The spaceship can't push buttons, but it can shoot.

Item one: the space flight sections. These act as a segue between or interruption to the body of the standard FPS action. Outward appearance isn't always a measure of inner quality, clearly, or most of the PC Games Addict team would be out on the street, begging. But in *Mace*'s case we can take it as a fairly accurate barometer of what's actually taking place. Point and shoot space-fights. They look stickle-brick basic and are all staggeringly simplistic to complete. Follow the cursor, shoot the HUD markers that indicate where your enemy is going, and then head back. As long as you don't fly headlong into enemy guns, you'll be fine every time. It's a dumb arcade blaster that could be six years old, given the PC's high standards of 3D space shooting.

These sections are a welcome interruption to the larger slice of the action – the 'on foot' first-person shooter sections – but that, my friends, is damning with faint praise...

Item two: running around and shooting. Mace's exploration of corridors

"Wastes precious hours of our short lives."

and rooms, killing all who oppose him, makes up the largest part of the game. In this regard *Bounty Hunter* has taken something from *Halo*, something we all rather liked: the rechargeable shield. Run away from your foe and lurk for a few moments and you'll be able to head back out there with a full forcefield. This can only take a few hits before you start taking real damage, and that hurts a whole lot more. This is a decent element of design in *Mace*; one of the few. The rest of the experience acts as a checklist of FPS mediocrity.

Obligatory sniper action? Check. Crawling through air ducts? Check. Poorly designed and confusing corridor section? You got it. Irritating bit of jumping? Of course. Blowing up an obstruction with explosive barrels? Yes, and yes. Now-standard jumping spider enemies? You bet. And there's more. Much more. None of it innovative or interesting. Actually the spiders are quite creepy, but that's beside the point.

Most of the game is spent fighting various humanoid enemies who are either scripted to attack in predictable ways, or simply run about, seemingly at random, taking pot-shots at you when they get the chance. Occasionally the enemies break down completely and stop moving or

The chaingun is a standard weapon from level one.

WHAT WE TOOK FROM IT

Like *Mace* we're going to tape LCD monitors to our faces, and let them do our emoting for us.

The Angry. This face demotes displeasure or disapproval. Beware the angry, for repercussions will be wrought.

The Happy. This facial expression indicates contentment or pleasure on the part of the user. Seldom used round here.

The Table Tennis Murderer had struck again.

Mace's ship.

SYSTEM MISER

How *Mace Griffin* will run on your PC.

■ Supported resolutions: **640x480 to 1024x768** ■ Scaleable options: **Motion blur, hardware shaders, dynamic lighting.**

VERDICT: **Some PCs will definitely want to turn off the motion blur effect, as it's hardly noticeable but seems to cause massive slowdown on some systems. *Bounty Hunter* should run adequately on a low spec system, but seemed to have random frame-rate drops on a number of machines we tried. Which was odd.**

Quotidian

spasm about on the spot. They're easily despatched on the standard difficulty setting and only the most inexperienced of gamers will fail to breeze through the opening levels without a moment of challenge.

Of course, all this means that you're often facing an averagely entertaining shooter as you play through some sections of *Bounty Hunter*. But average isn't good enough. Why should we be expected to waste precious hours of our short lives on something that doesn't stand out from years of other, similar games?

Most off-putting of all are the obvious flaws in game design. One instance, early on in the game, introduces a mid-action cut-scene. It's hard to see why this was included, especially when, if you're in the wrong part of the room, the cut-scene puts you in the midst of soldiers that just came charging through the door. It's illogical and enormously irritating.

What's worse is that it's just such a bland experience. Like enduring a boring conversationalist, or sitting through a lacklustre TV program because someone else wants to watch it, playing *Mace Griffin* feels like you're putting up with second-best. And, in this case, you don't have to. Some of you might have seen *Mace Griffin* get a pat on the back from PlayStation land, but that just shows how much better FPS games are on the PC, doesn't it? We have higher standards and, hot damn, we're going to maintain them. *Halo* embarrasses this shoddy piece of disc-mongering on all fronts, despite being two years old. And more importantly we've got *Half-Life 2*, *Call of Duty* and *Doom III* all heading PC-wards over the next few months. I think that's a pretty decent summation: there's no need to burn your money here. *Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter* is just another wasted opportunity.

JIM ROSSIGNOL

PCGA PROFILE

Bounty Hunter is:
- **A bitter pill**
- **Charmless**
- **Predictable**

Bounty Hunter is not:
- **Of our time**
- **Contemporary**
- **Experimental**

■ Publisher **Vivendi** ■ Developer **Warthog** ■ Minimum System **PIII 800, 64Mb RAM, 3D card**
■ Recommended **P4 1GHz, 128Mb RAM, GeForce 3 or better** ■ Multi-Player **None**
■ Web Address **www.huntthemdown.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Halo: Combat Evolved
Not the prettiest thing these days, but a fine experience nonetheless.

Unreal II
The prettiest thing ever, but rather vapid and without the soul it required.

PC GAMES addict
Another victim of cross-platform development? Almost certainly.

55%

GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY / MANAGEMENT

SPACE COLONY

The Sims meets Futurama? Our expert investigates.

Depressingly, the skateboard and hoodie combo are still in fashion.

By the year 2015, walls will be obsolete.

Happy tourists. Possibly German. Possibly not.

FORK THAT

After the first set of missions, a fork appears. Following the peaceful path leads to a set of resource based missions. The war-path, meanwhile, is more RTS. Commendable variety.

I may look out-numbered, but it's all just a cunning ploy.

Never trust a man with glasses thicker than your fist.

YOU can just imagine the pitch. "It's management Real-Time Strategy, but with *The Sims*!" The shark-eyed executives on the dark side of the vast table suck their sceptical teeth, "But how's that going to work? I mean, which is it? Who's going to buy it?" Fair questions, and in less capable hands *Space Colony* could have been a true mess. But FireFly Studios, creators of the million-selling *Stronghold: Crusader*, have created a slick, accomplished and very likeable game.

Pinning down the nature of this hybrid beast is tricky. The game is mission based, yet your colony demands hands-on management. Vegetation must be hacked, minerals plucked and the need to expand tugs at your sleeve like a needy child. Add to this objectives such as making two characters become 'special friends', building a golf course or improving your colony's tourist rating. It's admirably varied.

The resource management bit is standard. Harvest, process, sell, expand. Likewise, the war missions require tactics familiar to anyone who's ever played a RTS: slow encroachment on the enemy, judicious placement of lasers and shields. This is a game of patience and attrition (the inclusion of a fast-forward button is most considerate).

Had that been all, *Space Colony* would be a competent, lightweight, forgettable effort. But now the hook (just picture those bright shining eyes across the corporate table). Each station is inhabited by up to twenty characters who operate and maintain machinery and who

"You should find yourself chuckling throughout."

make the place a bit more personal. They're a demanding lot too. Their ever-decreasing status bars constantly cry out for wages, food, health, recreation and companionship. These desires must be sated to keep your space chums happy, and thus productive.

Comparing *Space Colony* to *The Sims* is as inevitable as it is misleading. It is, after all, the angle the game's marketing bods have plumped for, judging by the box art; an obvious move, given the mass-market penetration of Electronic Arts' title. On the one hand, it's justified. *Space Colony*'s slick, cartoon stylings fit the brief perfectly. Characterisation is robust, with each of the twenty a clichéd stereotype of one form or another. It works well, each of these outrageous caricatures displays a commendable degree of comedy; you should, personal tragedy aside, find yourself chuckling throughout. There's also consistency, as each require suitable recreation (the Scotsman drinks, the blonde shops, the weirdo likes to gaze at the stars), and relationships are encouraged. On the other hand, it's superficial. Characterisation only goes so far. For example, though some characters are better workers than others, everyone can be trained. This means that even the ditsy blonde in the pink suit can be the colony's most proficient miner. Likewise, rather than finding a suitable match in relationships, any partnership will work, if only for a short period of time. Simply put, this isn't *The Sims*. It has none of its

IT MUST BE LOVE, LOVE, LOVE...

Even the most unlikely relationships have a chance of succeeding. Isn't that right, Sarah Michelle? They're also a key feature of *Space Colony*. Time for a quick look at how this futuristic life-sim plays the dating game.

The attractive, intelligent redhead asks the mad Scotsman to dance. Must be a charisma thing.

Get down with your funky self. Happiness increases, and friendship is made. But what happens next?

There. Happy now? Just two adults, enjoying life in the hot-tub. Where's the soap? Yes, it does.

Golf? In zero gravity?.

Relaxation, Scottish style.

Shields like this provide essential protection.

SYSTEM MISER

How *Space Colony* will play on *your* PC.

- Supported resolutions: **800x600, 1024x768, 1280x1024**
- Scaleable options: **none**

VERDICT: Not much to report. The game runs fine on minimum spec. Even common problems such as juddery scrolling and slowdown during hectic moments were hardly noticeable, although RAM was the key here. Had plenty of it. Might be a different story otherwise. The game isn't heavy on effects, so most systems should run a pretty good game.

Similar

voyeuristic appeal, its lure to idly tinker with everyday virtual life. *Space Colony* lacks the mischief. Instead, the player watches his characters with a benevolent, fatherly eye. They look like Sims, even to the extent of having thought icons appear above their heads, but here these are more requests for you to fulfil a need than betrayal of a character's feelings.

Is this criticism? No, not really. Truth is, had this game been as complex as any of the benchmark titles in the respective genres of management, RTS or... er... *The Sims*, this reviewer would now be permanently hugging himself with the aid of a special strappy coat. There are times in the game when there's so much happening at once, all you can do is stare and gibber. This game is, in essence, a juggling act, and given its hybrid nature, there are few games which ask the player to keep so many balls in motion at once. Had the aforementioned complexity, subtlety or scope been misjudged, this could have been *Space Chaos*, but it isn't. FireFly's prudence in limiting the options of each facet is perfectly judged.

Not that it's perfection. You can battle for hours, fighting a lost cause, since the game seems to believe failure is always the best way to learn. Levels are designed to be played a certain way, and the difference between success and failure can depend on actions taken at the very start of a mission, something of an own goal given the game's gradual, tactical, time-consuming nature. But these aren't faults of *Space Colony*, more symptoms of the genre itself. Fact is, *Space Colony* hardly puts a moon-booted foot wrong.

The game has a cohesive sense of self. Is it something new? No. Stealing and splicing ideas does not equal originality. In this case, however, it does make for an enjoyable yet challenging experience. Add to this a good tutorial, smooth learning curve, and a user-friendly toolset, and you have a great gaming package.

JUDE NICHOLAS

PCGA PROFILE

Space Colony is:
- **Likeable**
- **Challenging**
- **A bastard (in the proper sense of the word)**

Space Colony is not:
- **Truly original**
- **A genre leader**
- ***The Sims***

■ Publisher **Take Two** ■ Developer **FireFly Studios** ■ Minimum System **PIII 800, 64Mb RAM, 850Mb HD space, 4Mb 3D card** ■ Recommended **P4 1.2GHz, 128Mb RAM** ■ Multi-Player **None**
■ Web Address **www.spacecolonygame.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

The Sims
For people who like to meddle in other people's lives.

Rise of Nations
A different class of game, and a minor masterpiece of RTS magic.

PC GAMES addict

More than the sum of its parts, this feels fresh. A likeable little game.

80%

GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY

C&C: GENERALS ZERO HOUR

A mission pack on a mission – with lots of plot and harder hardware.

Slow-cooks vehicles and tunnel networks. Lousy with pasties.

The glorious new Chinese Helix helicopters. Together at last – practicality and brutality.

SCHLOCK AND AWE

The new Generals Challenge is a superb, click-and-go version of the story game which works as both a trainer for newcomers and a more intense lesson in choosing the right tactics for the situation. Each opponent is a specialist in (a) a particular brand of warfare (tank power, (defensive, guerilla) and (b) taunting you.

PCGA PROFILE

Zero Hour is:
- **Great value**
- **An evil time-thief**
- ***C&C: Generals Deluxe***

Zero Hour is not:
- **Low-spec friendly**
- **For RTS newcomers**
- **PC**

Striking

WAR may be hell and all that, but there's no need for fiddliness. *Zero Hour* is a high-value add-on which tweaks all the right story spots, tucks in a few flabby interface issues and even finds room for an all-new single-player mode which introduces a joyous new dimension to the military arena – childish taunting and diabolical laughter.

Worries over a lapse in production values have proved groundless. If anything, on top of the masses of new military hardware and strategic fine-tuning, *Zero Hour* has turned out to be less mission pack, more remix.

The Story Mode plot has been polished to reflect the current geopolitical grimness, with Al Qaeda-style zealots the GLA regrouping and taking on the US under a new figurehead – chemical weapons guru Dr Thrax. As The Free World busies itself with The Evildoers, the Chinese Dragon begins to squirm through Europe...

Despite its release coinciding with the recent Iraq unpleasantness, the original *Generals* was a meaty real-world rework of the *C&C* formula – with one or two niggles (too easy, dodgy AI, system-hogging effects, dubious balance). Happily, *Zero Hour* feels like a genuine response to player feedback – particularly in terms of evening the odds a little. The previously over-aggressive US side is shored up with the Fire Base (a manned bunker armed with a mighty howitzer) and the hugely satisfying Sentry Drone (a camouflaged robot scout which can either search and destroy or hang around at base to back up your defences).

Key changes on the Chinese side include an electronics-scrambling Banshee tank, a cash-leeching Internet Centre and a gigantic Helix 2 assault helicopter capable of

"Wheelie-jumping off cliffs into the enemy..."

dropping napalm bombs and transporting units (including Overlord tanks).

The notoriously flaky GLA have been gifted some of the best new toys. Combat Bikes are nippy, nasty and geographically versatile (wheelie-jumping off cliffs into the heart of marooned enemy defences is good fun), and the Battle Bus is a fortified mobile bunker which can carry a healthy bunch of ranting psychopaths. Best of all is the Sneak Attack – a massive tunnel network which can accommodate all units and whose exit can be planted anywhere on the map.

All sides have plenty of other new units, power-ups and even buildings, and the feeling of having to support inferior hardware with guile (particularly with the GLA) has been significantly smoothed over. Of course, you could always play on 'Hard' mode... The new single-player mode, Generals Challenge, adds an arcadey element of instant gratification. Select your own particular brand of megalomaniacal loony (air-power specialist or WMD junkie?), square up to a contrasting general and wipe out his entire sorry operation.

Zero Hour is much more than the standard add-on pack containing ideas that should have been in the original in the first place. It turns a good game into a great game and, if you had any kind of fun with the original, you need to bump it to the top of your must-buy list immediately.

ANDY LOWE

■ Publisher **Electronic Arts** ■ Developer **Electronic Arts Los Angeles** ■ Minimum System **PIII 800, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card** ■ Recommended **P4 1.8, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **LAN, internet, up to 8** ■ Web Address **www.eagames.com/official/cc_generals/** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

C&C: Generals
More future war. Superb for multi-play, excellent for all-round strategy.

Warcraft III
Hugely classy real-time strategy with orcs, and a flavouring of RPG.

PC GAMES addict
Complex missions, tighter balance, masses of variety and new stuff. Victorious.

87%

GENRE: TURN-BASED STRATEGY

MASSIVE ASSAULT

Ground Control, but with frequent teabreaks.

The 'undo' button is a real boon.

Savour martial masterstrokes with real-time replays.

Low-level vistas look lovely but dent framerates.

Turnstyle

PLEASE buy this game. I recommend it not because it's particularly special (although it *is* particularly special) but because the more people who purchase and play it the more chance there is that somebody will be able to help me out. I need advice on how to hold onto the beleaguered cantons of Asilak and Legat in the second chapter of the 'Revolutionary Fire' campaign. I mean, I've put my faith in Death Turrets, I've tried picketing the mountain passes with Smallfoots, I've even sent in the Ostriches and yet I still don't feel I'm any closer to knowing the secret.

The absorbing, conundrum-like character of this scenario is fairly typical of a game that looks disconcertingly like a pretty but passé RTS, at first glance. But on closer inspection it turns out to be a wonderfully uncluttered, tactically transcendent, turn-based hex wargame. *Massive Assault* has the good sense to hide its honeycomb under pleasing, pixel-shaded, 3D visuals. It's only when you go to move a unit and see six possible destinations highlighted on the ground that the underlying geometry is revealed. The developers have made no misguided attempt to tamper with traditional turn structures, however. You manoeuvre battlewagons and conduct combat, then your opponent gets to do the same.

"Hides its honeycomb under 3D visuals."

Well, okay, perhaps it's not *quite* that simple. Recruitment and 'disclosure' phases punctuate play too, allowing commanders to replenish ranks and activate allied territories. Most games commence with dormant friendly states scattered around the map. Choosing when to wake these is important as each generates revenue while its borders are intact. Beside a couple of defensive towers there's no structure building at all in *MA*, no R+D, resource gathering or unit customisation either. The fact that you don't miss any of this stuff is a testament to great balancing, able artificial opposition, and a profound understanding of what makes strategy games successful.

An accomplished AI that chooses targets wisely and responds to incursions swiftly ensures skirmish matches are memorable, but also draws attention to the regrettable absence of difficulty levels. Add to this complaint the missing multi-player modes (PBEM and LAN will hopefully be added via patches) and editors, and some lengthy enforced pauses in large engagements while the CPU hatches plans, and we're getting close to a full and fair picture of a game that thankfully remembers to remove the baby before vigorously throwing out the genre's murky bathwater.

TIM STONE

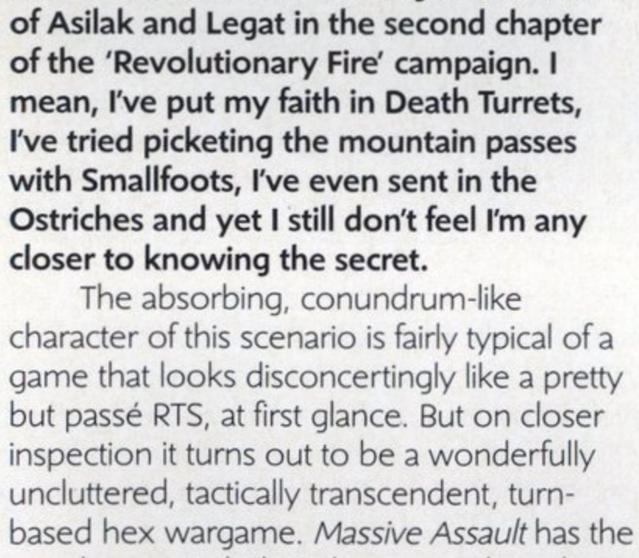
I LUV MY LAV

MA **boasts a mere 13 basic unit types and the most expensive of these – the Aircraft Carrier – costs a bank-breaking $6. At a buck a piece the humorously monikered Lav jeeps are real bargains; not as quite as quick as you'd imagine but ideal for harassing and holding up invasion forces.**

PCGA PROFILE

Massive Assault is:
- Accessible
- Chess-like
- The handsomest hex game ever

Massive Assault is not:
- Carrying any dead wood
- A pushover
- A Massive Attack tribute band


AI bombers will single-out your pride-and-joys.

■ Publisher **GMX Media/Matrix Games** ■ Developer **Wargaming.net** ■ Minimum System **600MHz, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card** ■ Recommended **P4 1.5GHz, 512Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **Hotseat, Internet, two players** ■ Web Address **www.massiveassault.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Ground Control
Another one that dispensed with all that tedious resource grubbing.

Battle Isle: Andosia War
The review's 'big word' 'Missile' summed this one up succinctly.

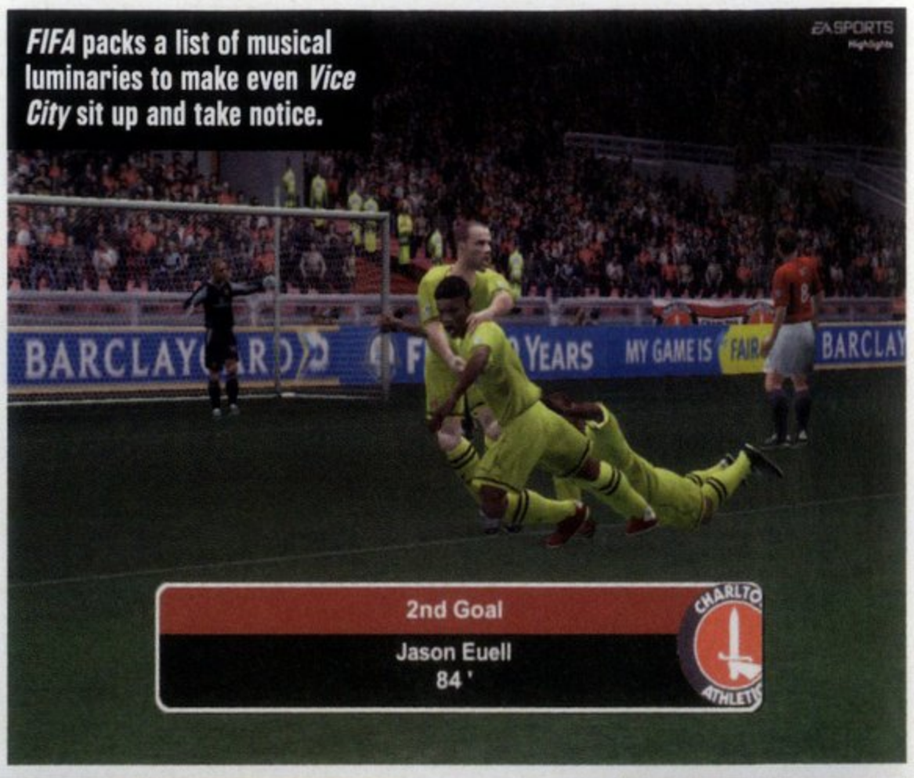
PC GAMES addict
A breath of fresh air. Back-to-basics battlecraft that deserves to do well.

77%

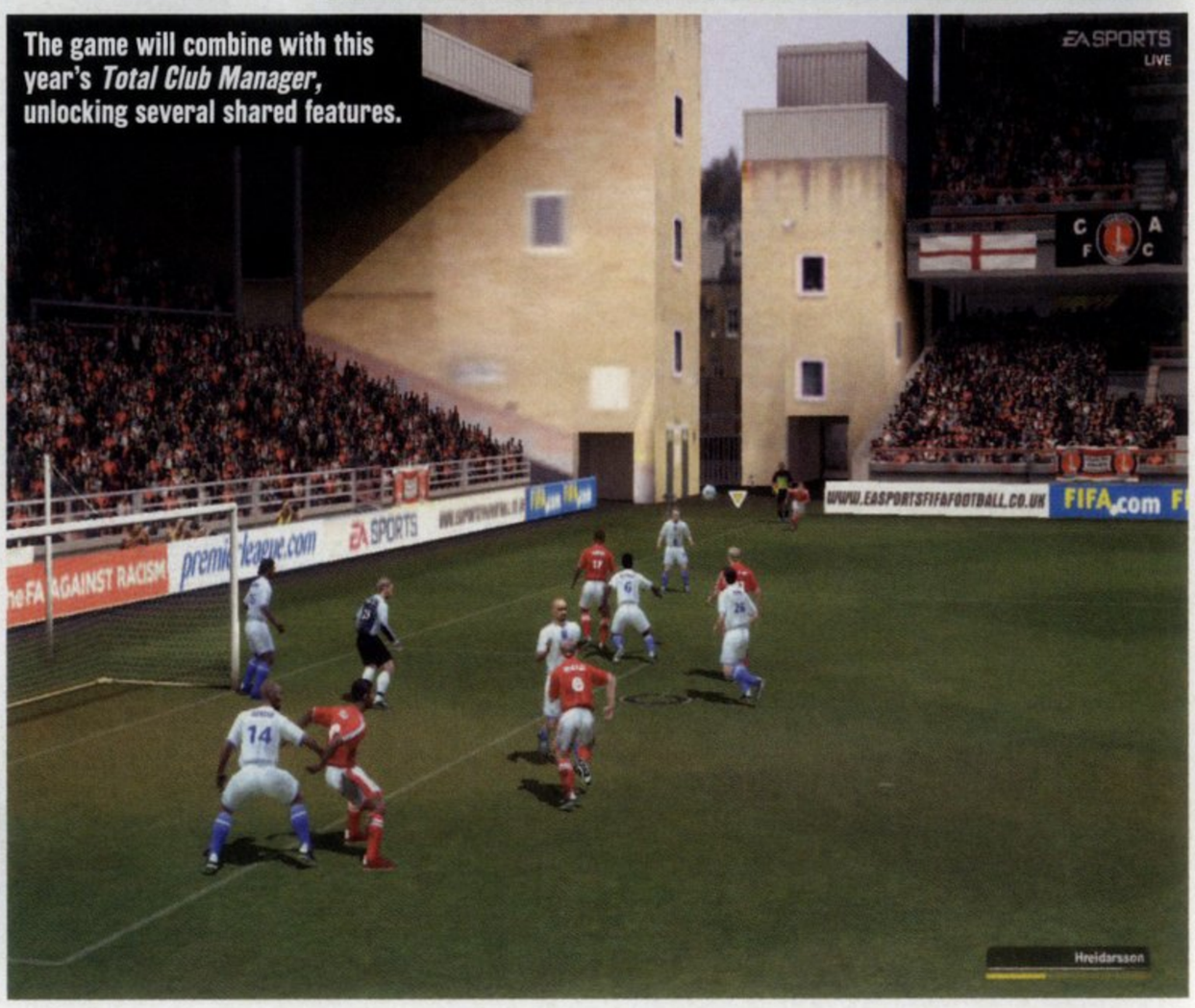
GENRE: SPORTS

FIFA SOCCER 2004

Facing its toughest opposition yet, *FIFA* plays the game of its life.



FIFA packs a list of musical luminaries to make even *Vice City* sit up and take notice.



The game will combine with this year's *Total Club Manager*, unlocking several shared features.

CAREER ADVICE

Undoubtedly derived from *Pro Evo*'s Master League feature, the career mode allows you to take the reins of a Nationwide club and steer them through the divisions. Weekly transfers, player and team training are governed by a base level of Prestige Points which can be accumulated by achieving season objectives which in turn depend on the level your managing. It proves a worthy distraction but only while there's nobody around or online for a spot of multi-player.

THIS was crunch time. The most important game in *FIFA*'s long illustrious career. True, the boo boys had been silenced, but ever since Konami's *Pro Evolution Soccer* stepped off the plane things had changed.

FIFA's ever-present position at the centre of PC soccer fans' hearts was in jeopardy. The masses had already started looking to the Japanese import, excited by the flawless performances played out on foreign fields. Rumours were in circulation of a *Pro Evo* reeking of confidence – swaggering around town in a faster car and bedding *FIFA*'s high maintenance wife. Meanwhile *FIFA* was concentrating on its game – putting in the hours on the training grounds and going back to basics...

It's paid off. The *FIFA* series has put in a match-winning effort just when it mattered most.

Some things were never in doubt. We knew that that this would be another beautifully veneered title from the EA Sports production line and so it has proved. A combination of over 500 football licences contribute 16 leagues, 350 teams and over 10,000 players, with kits, sponsors, scarily realistic player likenesses and awe-inspiring stadia adding shapely flesh to the considerable bones. We expected nothing less, but what *FIFA 2004* does better than any of its predecessors is immerse us in this glossy virtual world.

It's the little things that count. The cries of "Glory glory" from the Old Trafford faithful, a stumbled word in the commentary (this time provided by the altogether more convincing double act of John Motson and Ally McCoist), the way mud clings to the kit as the match progresses, the flawless animation of an aerial duel and the views from the terraces as the gleeful crowd celebrate a goal.

"A giant rangy stride towards perfection."

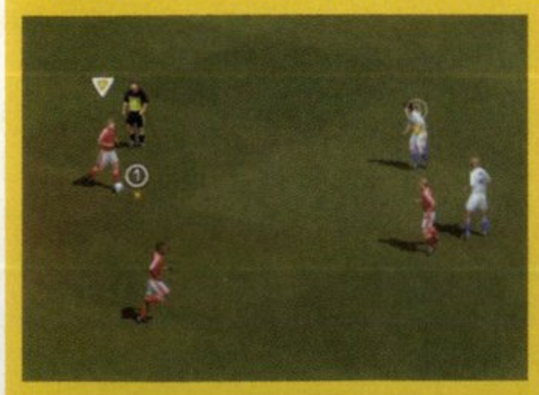
It's not a perfect performance by any means – the commentary lags badly at times, and the off field models and crowd have dressed in their favourite cardboard outfits for the occasion – but quantity wins over quality. Your senses are constantly bombarded with the sights and sounds of the real game until its simply too much for you to resist.

It's normally on the pitch that this careful illusion is shattered. Year on year EA have edged ever nearer the sport, turning their back on arcade sentiments to move ever closer to a true simulation – only for the latest piece of gimmickry to fail the formula. And indeed, *FIFA 2004* has its rough patches, but this time they're only momentary stumbles in a giant rangy stride towards perfection.

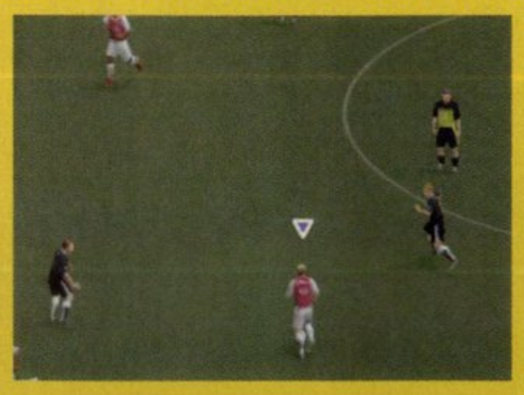
This is a passing game and all the tools are in place to make it so. The extended pitch, the low tempo and most significantly the new 'Off the Ball' controls (see 'Look, No Balls!'). Yes, it's another gimmick, but this time well conceived and what do you know – it almost works. You need time and space to use the feature, but despite the drop in pace you're rarely going to get that because the midfield is usually so crowded. Master off-the-ball moves, though, and you'll reap the rewards, particularly in multi-player where your opponent is unlikely to display the same defensive discipline as the AI. Like an ultra-sharp chisel, the off-the-ball feature is the key to chipping away at the *2004* defence, which displays impeccable

LOOK, NO BALLS!

This year's new-fangled feature hands you the power to control not just the player in possession but the players off the ball too. If you've been wondering what that right analogue stick on your pad was for, *FIFA* has the answer.

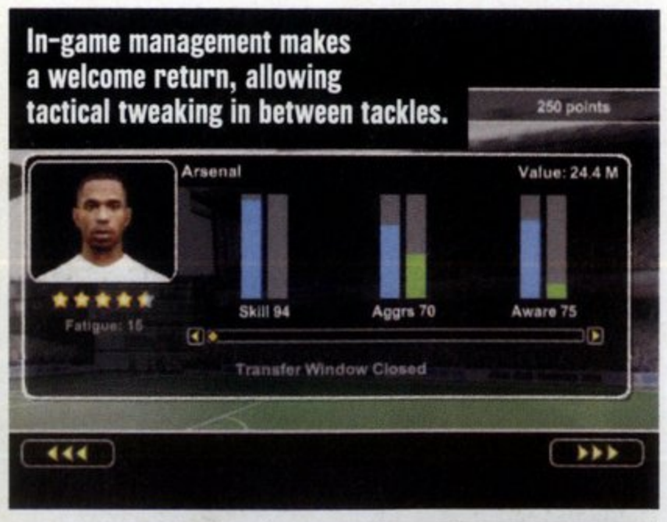


Activate Remote Receiver mode and you can send players on off-the-ball runs with the right-hand analogue stick.

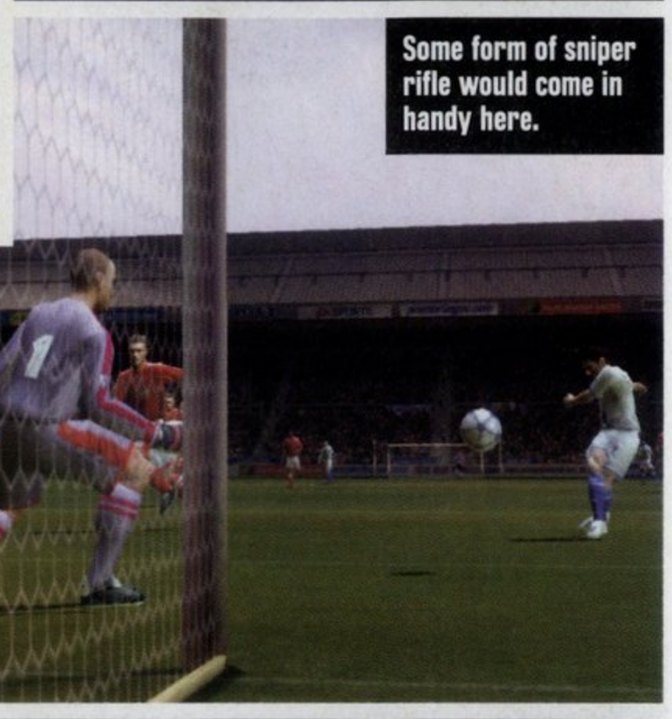


Trigger nearby teammates to make runs into space for your well-placed through balls. Rather tricky to pull off.

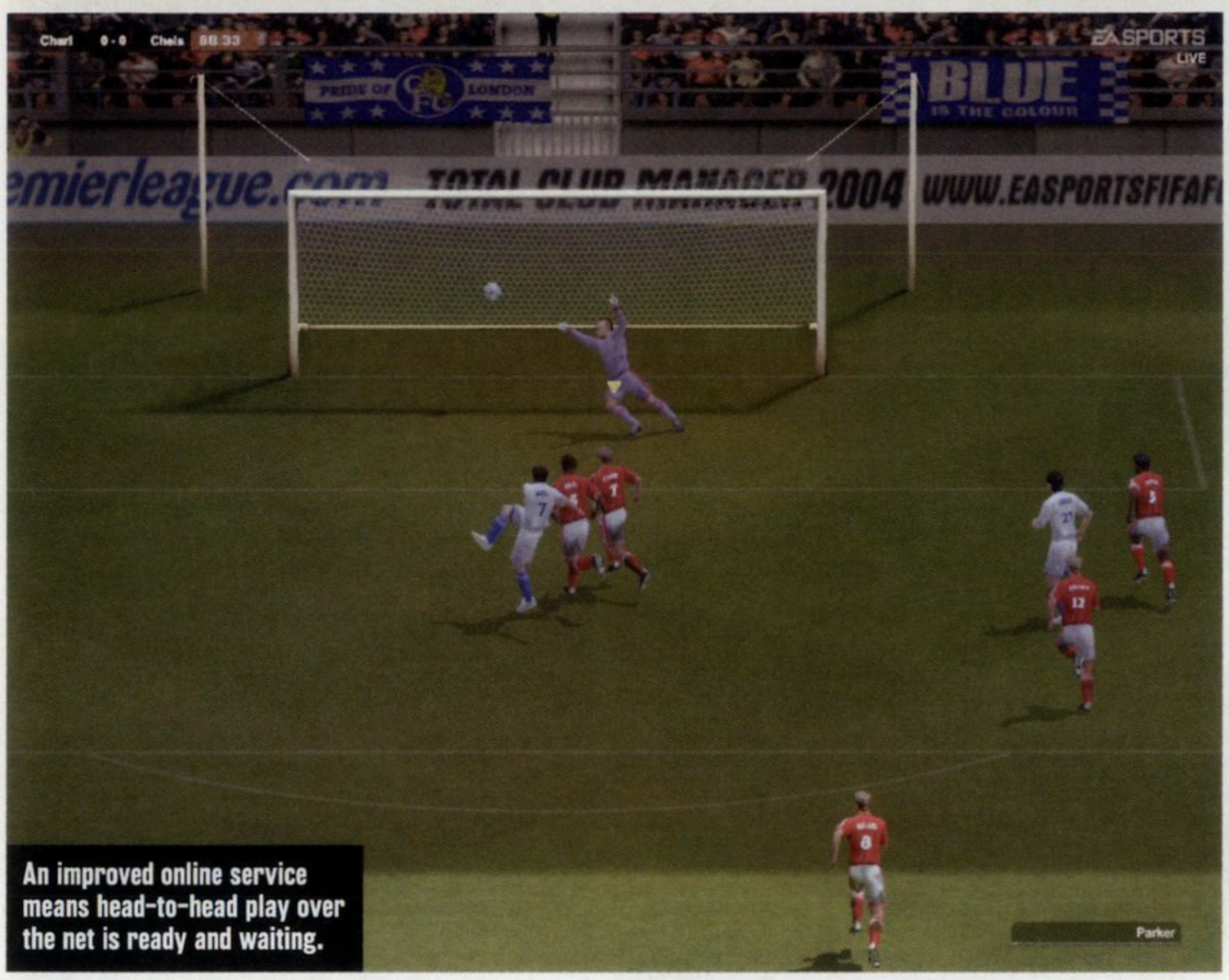
Pile the pressure on the ball carrier by calling in a second defender – just don't go leaving any gaping holes.



In-game management makes a welcome return, allowing tactical tweaking in between tackles.



Some form of sniper rifle would come in handy here.



An improved online service means head-to-head play over the net is ready and waiting.

SYSTEM MISER

How *FIFA Football 2004* will play on *your* PC

■ Supported resolutions: **640x480, 800x600, 1024x768, 1280x1024, 1600x1200** ■ Scaleable options: **None**

VERDICT: **EA have upped the specs considerably from last year to squeeze in the improved engine and staggering player models and animation. The minimum spec seems generous and *FIFA*'s impressive aesthetic will take a hit if run on anything lower that a 32Mb 3D card. You're also going to need at least 128Mb of RAM in your rig to run a fluid match.**

Blinder

marking and is bolstered by a far more effective 'foot in' feature.

Defence dominates this year, as you probe and prod with the feather touch of a safe cracker, desperately trying to get even a flash of the goalkeeper's jersey. Star players are the lock pickers, boosted by over a dozen new stats (with a new scale of 1-100). Each of your eleven men now has enhanced personality, and getting the ball to your midfield general or pacey attacker is vital to success. Identifying these players and zeroing in on opponents' weakness are other subtle layers draped over this new *FIFA* experience. They will come but goals are precious commodities, just as they should be, and there's a swell of satisfaction from bulging *FIFA*'s net that has been lacking in the past.

Predictably, EA don't have the whole stadium on their feet. Some critics will point to the new set-pieces. An attempt to promote the off-the-ball elements, these insert mini-games that have you control the precipitant of corners and indirect free kicks rather than the taker. It's designed to be a test of timing and skill but instead it smacks of pure guesswork, leaving you scratching your head while the ball boy scrambles for the bouncing ball.

Another small gaggle of dissenters will single out the likes of the half-baked Career mode (see 'Career Advice'), or the inaccuracies of the new player database, complete with missing players, mixed-up skin colours, wandering moustaches and no data editor to put them right. There's also a question mark over the longevity of the single-player game with little comprehensible difference between the higher levels. Also, the controls could have been mapped to PC joypads better – dual analogue pads are a necessity.

So, plenty of work to be done among the cones and bibs of the development studio, but *FIFA* wouldn't be the same without something to improve upon. The difference this time is that it has an ultra talented wannabe breathing down its officially licensed neck. Come Christmas *FIFA* might not be the first name on the team sheet, but right now it's chosen a good time to show its class.

MARK SUTHERNS

PCGA PROFILE

FIFA 2004 is:
- **Beautifully immersive**
- **An intense sim experience**
- **A multi-player must**

FIFA 2004 is not:
- **Immediately accessible**
- **Fast and frantic football**
- **A keyboard gamer's dream**

■ Publisher **Electronic Arts** ■ Developer **EA Sports Canada** ■ Minimum System **PIII 600, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb RAM 3D card** ■ Recommended **PIII 800, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb RAM 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **LAN 1-4, Online 1-2** ■ Web Address **www.fifa2004.ea.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

PC GAMES addict

Plays out of its skin just when it needed to. The Boy done good. Very good indeed.

88%

OOH... CHOICES, CHOICES

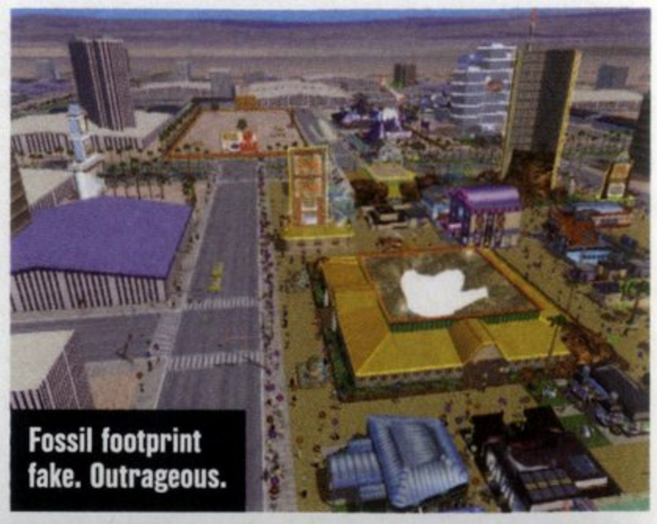
FIFA 2003
Sooo last year, but this is where the foundations for today's FIFA were laid.

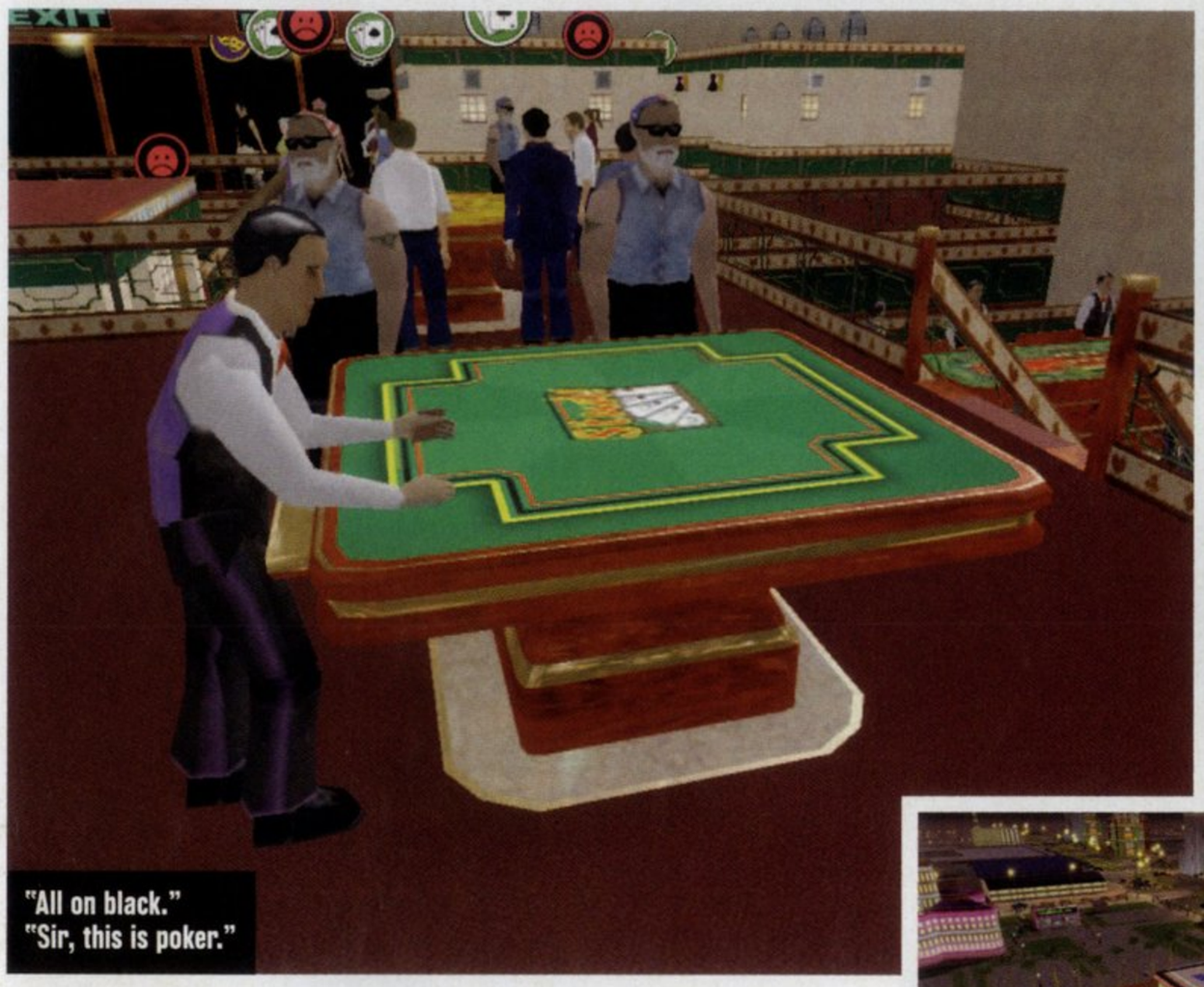
FIFA 2002
The game that sucked the lunchtimes from the PC Games Addict office.

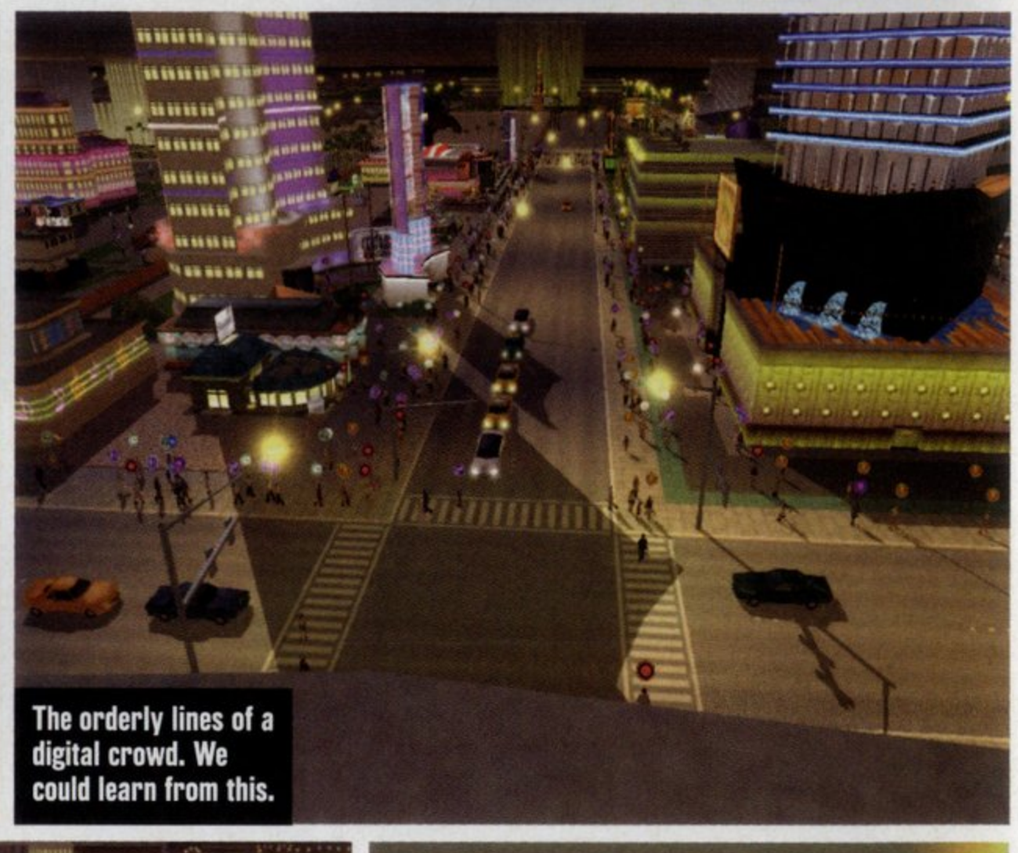
GENRE: MANAGEMENT

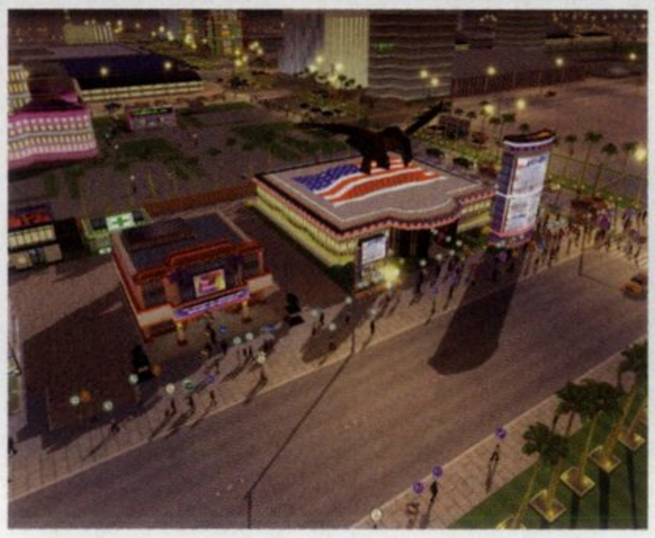
VEGAS MAKE IT BIG

Punters rush in to play roulette.


Fossil footprint fake. Outrageous.


"All on black." "Sir, this is poker."


The orderly lines of a digital crowd. We could learn from this.



Note lack of gamblers. Ooer.

PLAYING THE ODDS

You can manipulate the bet range (how much each player lays down per hand or roll) and house odds (how much you expect to get back per hand) for every game in your casinos. It's always best to provide a variety – you want to keep the high rollers amused whilst catering for the little old ladies. Don't feel too guilty about depriving Maud of her pension – she'd only leave it to the local cats' home.

THERE'S a bingo hall near the PC Games Addict offices. Just before lunch a queue forms, maybe four or five venerable ladies waiting for their daily fix. It goes unnoticed by the rest of the office, but from my window I see something else. I examine their habits, their dress. I calculate their likes and dislikes. Are they hungry? Is it too noisy for them? Are they happy? I mean, truly, deep down, on the inside? From my second storey window, I've become a social anatomist, dissecting habits with humour. I'm an obsessive gambler obsessive.

The typical structure of a modern management game works like this: consumers turn up, expecting some form of entertainment and goods to be provided. You spot a niche in the market, build, hire and suck cash. Repeat until rich. *Vegas* is different. You buy plots of land, build neon cathedrals to the gods of capitalism, fill them with baize altars and watch the tribute roll in. Your guests still have desires, but they don't expect a return on their investment. They're perfectly happy to arrive with pockets bulging and leave with nothing.

Danger: wide load.

It's the people who make *Vegas* big. The game engine does a sterling job of drawing the crowds on The Strip – thousands of people are visible at any moment. They may not be rendered with *Doom III* levels of detail, but watching the early evening crowds jostle up and down your streets as the sun sets is a strangely moving experience. Technologically, this is by far the most advanced management game created.

And this is what makes *Vegas* engaging: the missions are designed in such a way that pulling in the hordes and relieving them of their hard-earned isn't too difficult. A medium sized casino can be expected to pull in about 25k a day, more than enough to fund any outlandish theme parks or absurd night-glo monuments. But, it's unrelated objectives that keep you ticking over. Provide entertainment for 500 guests, make sure a 'whale' has plenty to do in-between spending GDP level cash, sell 5,000 fine leather jackets... In effect, the provision of entertainment, food, drinks and lodging is a peripheral element. Your goal is to keep them playing.

Levels begin with you choosing your first 'lot' – a piece of empty, disused land where you can sow your seedy empire. Positioning isn't vital – if you build it, they will come. But you can't just throw up the larger casinos immediately. Unusually for a management game, Deep Red have chucked in a real-time strategy-type tech tree. To access to the fun stuff, you must invest in precursor buildings: for instance, a first-aid post and an electrician's hut are needed before you can place a fireworks platform. And these buildings really are an investment: as in *SimCity 4* you're tapped for their daily upkeep. But it's an idea that doesn't work in Vegas. It feels like an unnecessary complication.

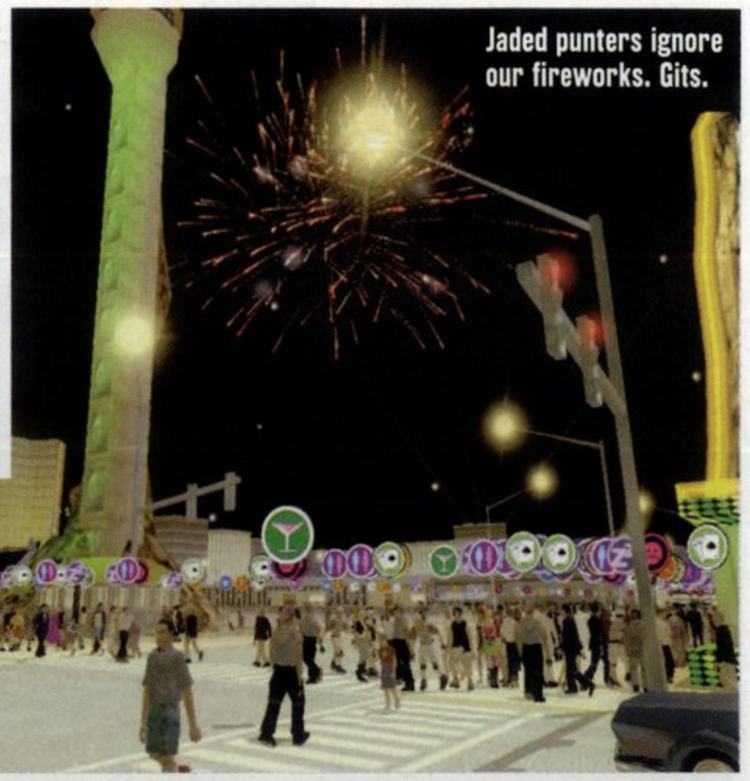
To make matters even more convoluted, you're required to memorise three of the tech trees: one for your external structures, one for your external improvements and upgrades, and a series of employee hutches to maintain the

SYSTEM MISER

How *Vegas: Make it Big* will play on *your* PC

- Supported resolutions: **640x480x16 to 2048x1536x32**
- Scaleable options: **Texture quality, world detail, hollow soullessness, little old lady bafflement factor**

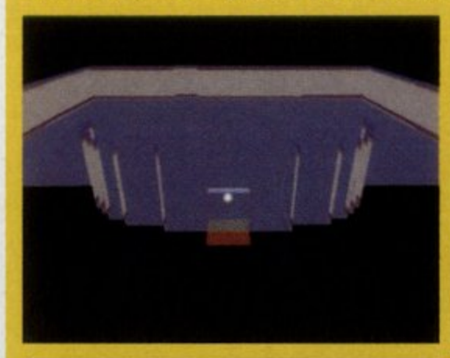
VERDICT: **The *Vegas* engine does a good job of scaling itself down or up to match your PC. You can reduce loading times using the 'quickload' option but doing this will cause repeated pausing within the game, as it searches for models. Loading times using lower-spec PCs can be immense – we counted around two and half minutes for a single level on one test machine.**



Giant space spanner. Useful for fixing loose astronuts.

LAYING TABLES.

Building your first casino is a major job. Noise levels, smells and beauty must be taken into account. Don't be afraid to lower and raise the floor to segregate areas. And play with the odds on each table – you're not a charity.



Your first glimpse inside is daunting. That long, scary expanse of carpet needs to be filled. What to do?

The entrance is always a fine place to put a statue or two. Remember, those first impressions count.

Cutting the ribbon. There is no ribbon to speak of, but you could imagine one. A pink one, cut with a giant pair of scissors.

Money

tables and arcades within your casinos. But the daft thing is, the support buildings are essentially useless. Once you've built the big shiny cash-gobbler you've been lusting over for weeks, you can flog all the structures you needed to get it, regaining cash and space. It's an odd, and unsuccessful innovation.

Back to the creative bit. Tycoon games are at their best when the hard-nosed economic planning can also be expressed with a little architectural creativity. It helps to feel you're imprinting your personality onto the game. Designing the internal layout of your casino is where you sate your artistic urges in Vegas. The four basic food groups of Nevada are here: card tables, slot machines, lounges and group games (Roulette, Craps and Baccarat). There's plenty of scope to build a beautiful casino, but only a few ways to make money. High roller tables are the key: drawing in a day's worth of profit with a single spin of a wheel. It's a demanding business, too: a large, high quality casino can take upwards

"Build neon cathedrals to the gods of capitalism."

of an hour to fill, and you have absolutely no idea if it will be a success until you un-pause the game. But at the same time, it's the ultimate gamble – investment is its own reward when your first customers start frittering away their life savings.

Problems? I've shared a few. The interface tends to obscure the most useful functions. Laying down even the simplest potted plant takes upwards of four clicks, and that isn't fun. Similarly, essential financial information isn't always accessible – there's no single balance sheet to show exactly where you're making, or haemorrhaging, the green stuff. You can click on each table or building to see individual balances, but that information should be collated centrally.

And that's it. Missing information and an obtuse interface are the only things that prevent *Vegas* from hitting the big time. We hear that they hide the exit signs in real casinos, too. No wonder those little old ladies look so confused at chucking-out time.

TIM EDWARDS

PCGA PROFILE

Vegas: Make It Big is:
- **Glitzy**
- **Big**
- **Clever**

Vegas: Make It Big is not:
- **A jackpot**
- **Down and out**
- **All on red**

■ Publisher **Empire Interactive** ■ Developer **Deep Red** ■ Minimum System **PIII 600, 192Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card, 500Mb HD** ■ Recommended **PIII 800, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **None**
■ Web Address **www.vegasmakeitbig.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Casino Inc,
Routine management. No external problem solving.

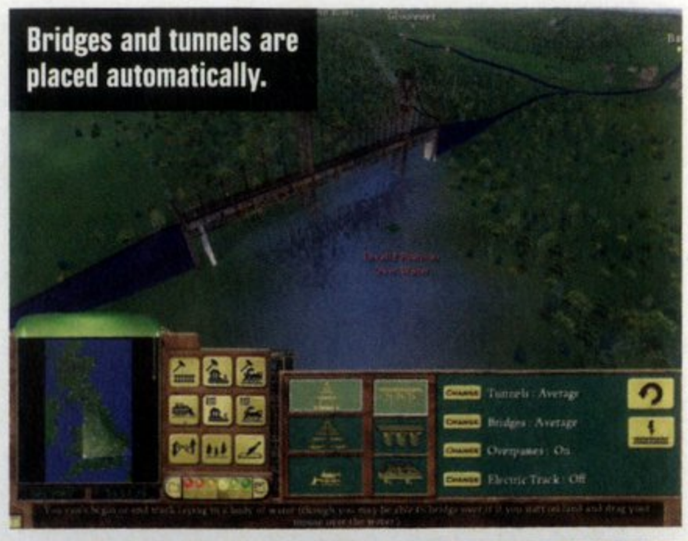
Monopoly Tycoon
Less boardgame, more wargame. Now available on budget.

PC GAMES addict
Only a few niggles prevent this casino simulator from hitting the jackpot.
80%

GENRE: MANAGEMENT

RAILROAD TYCOON 3

Valve take note – this is how you should really power something by Steam.


Bridges and tunnels are placed automatically.

Once you've got everything in place, you can disable the entire interface and just watch the pretty trains.
MORNING HERALD
Engineers develop steel railway bridges
Cheaper than stone bridges
RECORD PRICE PAID FOR REMBRANDT PAINTING AT AUCTION
Service Tower
Cost: $30K
Locked
Flexible
Passengers
This car is 100% full, with a delivery value of $19K

Chuffed

LOOK, it's important I get this out of the way now: despite my bespectacled appearance and fondness for synthetic fabrics, I'm not a trainspotter. I've never been reduced to a cold sweat by an engine number, I only haunt train platforms under extreme duress, and I've never seen a locomotive as anything other than a tiresomely fragile means of transportation. I've only ever witnessed one trainspotter, and they conformed so frighteningly to the bad stand-up stereotype I thought I was on a hidden camera show.

As such, a game clearly targeted at those who don't so much have a soft spot as a damp patch for all things rail-bound doesn't ooze appeal, and the dread 'Tycoon' suffix doesn't do much to restore my confidence. A cursory glance past the misty-eyed opening babble about "iron horses" and the crooning Randy Newman-style soundtrack suggests simple join-the-dots track creation between settlements, picking profitable routes and the right trains and manifests. Next comes the business of issuing stocks and bonds to finance expansion, finding the most profitable trade routes, and buying up other businesses.Then you've got to go to the stock market to boost your personal fortune. And then it hits you: you've just become a real, bona fide tycoon and you really enjoyed it.

It's the depth that appeals. While you can just play through one of the numerous campaign scenarios, worrying only about connecting certain towns in any way you see fit, to earn the Gold accolade you've also got to boost your bank balance and

"You've just become a real, bona fide tycoon."

crush your competitors. Crushing is done by interfering with stock prices through careful buying and selling while the economy ebbs and flows around you. Stat-viewing is available but not totally essential, and minimal micromanagement means you can leave the basics running in the background. There's a surprising number of challenges, too, the more advanced levels hitting you with fiendish twists like timed crop spraying or dealing with the demands of war.

If you want to take things even further, there are several historical challenges, a sandbox mode for marvelling at the reasonably impressive 3D graphics – one of the few times you'll really need the 3D camera to zoom in from orbit – a full-fledged level editor and an online multi-player mode.

An over-emphasis on train trivia and skimping on the fine detail does makes this more of a management game for train fans than the train game for management fans it should be. The alluring potential of being a filthy capitalist pig-dog is also limited as there's little practical advice on Share Trading for Profit and Evil, and the AI of both your opponents and your board of directors veers between bizarrely random and utterly merciless. There are a few practical niggles in the placing of track and stations, too. Nevertheless, if you can cope with all that, this is a management game from the right side of the tracks.

JON HICKS

GLAD TO BE GREEN

Weirdly, despite using the sort of business practices that would make Bill Gates blush, *RT3* has a right-on message when you click round to the futuristic levels. They're all based on a future where you're left in no doubt as to how GLOBAL WARMING HAS DESTROYED THE PLANET. I blame coal-burning locos, personally.

PCGA PROFILE

RT3 is:
- About being a real tycoon
- Well rolling-stocked
- Feeling Hornby

RT3 is not:
- On rails
- Steam-powered
- Entirely about trains

■ Publisher **Take Two** ■ Developer **PopTop Software** ■ Minimum System **PIII 400, 128Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card** ■ Recommended **PIII 800, 256Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **LAN, internet, up to 4**
■ Web Address **www.railroadtycoon3.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Railroad Tycoon II Platinum Edition
Pop Top's first stab at tycoon train management, and still a corker.

Restaurant Empire
Lacks the scope, flair, and potential for evil, but you do get some jolly nice recipes.

PC GAMES addict

Model trains on elephant steroids, as played by Richard Branson. Top stuff.

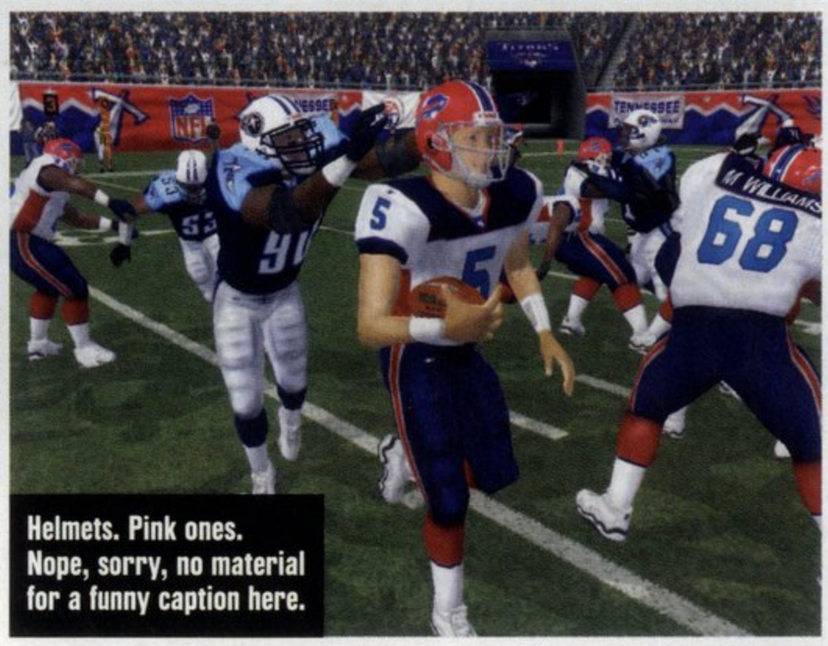
86%

MADDEN NFL 2004

The referee's a Yank, er...

■ Publisher **EA Sports** ■ Developer **EA Sports**

The human pyramid still wasn't quite right.



Helmets. Pink ones. Nope, sorry, no material for a funny caption here.

THE first rule of EA Sports is "Only release games when there's an 'O' in the month" - so cue the big man himself. Mr Madden: the only man weighty enough to muscle his way in front of EA Sports' traditionally official titular initials.

Justifiably so, as it turns out, because you can hear dear John earning whatever megabucks the Vancouver studio are throwing his way by virtue of his tireless, near-perfect punditry. Unlike the non-stop, high-speed relentlessly pacy nature of sports such as ice-hockey, basketball and soccer, gridiron American football is such a stop-start succession of sporty snippets that when you're not concentrating on picking your plays or controlling your quarterback (i.e. most of the time), it's Madden's authoritative tones you'll be relying on to provide the entertainment.

He, of course, dishes out the tips, tactics and stats while you attempt to muscle your way to victory by either steamrollering through the opposing man-mountains or completing pin-point throws up-field. While on defensive duties, the order of the day is eliciting fumbles or turnovers; doing anything in your team's power to prevent your rivals inching their ten yards of progress within their four attempts.

The passing and running system almost demands a gamepad to get the most from it, so consider investing in one before you buy. And get ready for a challenge; the game starts tough, with some quick decision-making needed to identify the best plays available in the few seconds before you get poleaxed.

Madden's design and execution has probably evolved the least in EA Sports' annual series of games, but the game's format (the quickfire strategic decision-making of player positioning and play selection) is already refined to such a high degree that it hardly matters. With *NHL*, *FIFA* and *NBA*, one feels EA Sports still have work to do. With *Madden*, they cracked it long ago. So the few improvents over last year's version they've managed to squeeze in (superior visuals, an mp3 jukebox and an analogue gamepad-demanding Playmaker facility that's tricky to execute during plays) are pretty superfluous.

Still, if *NHL* and *NBA* are stagnating through lack of innovation, and EA's constant tinkering of *FIFA* looks like re-alienating every generation of new gamers, *Madden* remains that glorious constant – a textbook PC sports sim that wants for nothing. Except maybe a few more Australian fans.

MATT PIERCE

Just don't leave your joypad at home.

PC GAMES addict

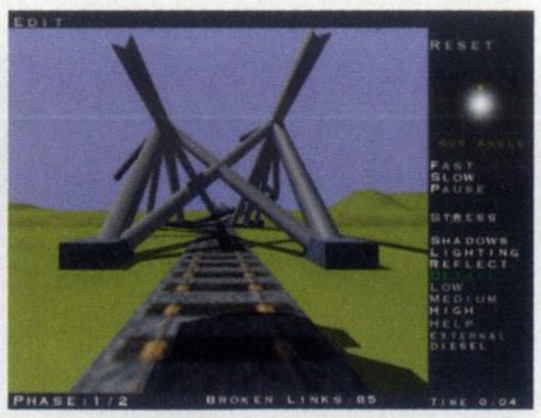
The only NFL sports-sim worth playing for fans of the genre. Both of them.

83%

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION SET

■ Publisher **www.garage games.com**

■ Developer **Chronic Logic**



General Donald, told that I "needed more support at work", cruelly laughed and tossed this over the festering pile of magazines, games and discarded staff writers separating our desks. Aha. Support. I see what he did there.

A sequel to *Pontifex*, this award-winner at the Independent Games Festival demands that you construct river crossings with Meccano-like components in a conveniently grid-based world. Limitations include hard points on banks and underwater, varying types of material in different scenarios and a set budget to pay for them. Success means your bridge can stand and take the weight of cars or a train without collapsing, or operate its hydraulics without tearing itself apart.

It's all much more compelling than it sounds but hindered by a cluttered interface. *BCS*'s great advance is its 3D view. You can now move the camera around the better to witness your Brunel-esque erection from – yes! – an angle. It does improve the experience, to be honest, enabling you to more clearly see the pressure points while testing out your steely structure. The level of challenge is well judged, ranging from kids' stuff to civil engineers' stuff; that said, kids will rebel at the interface. I'm not joking about the engineers, either. A 'complex' interface option adds finer control, while the help menu lists precise weights and various strengths for all the materials. As you'd hope, the physics are real enough to ensure all this makes sense, but not so real that you can't have fun with hydraulics.

As ever, www.garage games.com offer a trial download (13Mb) and a subsequent pay-to-unlock system. $USD20 seems fair enough for the only game that will ever cause me to stand and aggressively declare myself to be the office's foremost civil engineer. Quite unique.

ROSS ATHERTON

80%

GENRE: THIRD-PERSON ACTION

ENCLAVE

It may be lord of the bling, but you'll soon be bored of the thing.

Open air battlegrounds provide respite from the corridor combat.

After all that, I think I deserve a Pinot Noir.

HIT (POINTS) ME, BABY

Collision detection is just one of the areas that causes problems in *Enclave*, with seemingly lethal sword sweeps often gliding harmlessly through enemies. When both you and your enemies' attacks *are* successful, coloured hit points float skywards, indicating the severity of the strike. Yet revealing these arbitrary numbers remains pointless, since enemy health stats are never revealed to start with. Their presence only serves to hint at an underlying number-driven system that it would have been useful to access.

LIKE *Halo*, *Enclave* was one of the first PC titles tempted to the dark green side by Bill Gates' fledgling console division. Of course history proves that Microsoft's dogged pursuit of Master Chief was justified, but *Enclave* offers little evidence to support its own role as an ambassador for a next-gen console. And, now that it's ex-box, its shortcomings are even more evident.

Enclave is a third-person fantasy hack-'n'-slash romp that takes its fashion tips from Codemasters' *Severance: Blade of Darkness*. The apeing even extends to the game's fundamental problem: one of style over substance. Its wonderfully rich visuals, with sumptuous castles, verdant rolling exteriors, eerily lit winding staircases and flooded sewers are hugely atmospheric (if hackneyed); but graphical wizardry accomplished, it seems that the developers lost sight of their responsibility as *game* designers.

We're guessing that the sentence "combat-heavy action adventure with role-playing elements", appeared in the original design document. Unfortunately, an overzealous sub must have removed the "role-playing" somewhere along the way. To start with, think a fully 3D *Diablo*... Sounds okay, no? Hacking down hordes of creatures, hoarding hundreds of objects to use or sell on to traders, meeting and joining forces with like-minded but eclectically skilled NPCs...

Diabloical

PCGA PROFILE

Enclave is:
- Beautiful
- Shallow
- Unambitious

Enclave is not:
- Original
- Multi-player
- *Diablo* in 3D

"*Enclave* is as simple-minded as an infant kobold."

Now take that template and remove all the objects save for a finite number of 'secret' gold coins that are found behind crates as often as not; eliminate 90% of the creatures (along with much of the remaining examples' AI), and finally make the friendly NPCs so fundamentally ineffectual it'd be better if they didn't exist.

You're left with *Enclave*; a game that proves as simple-minded as an infant kobold. A quick hack here, a brief slash there. Hammer the attack key until the beasts be dead, then proceed on your linear-pathed missions. The lack of a multi-player mode means the only variety comes from alternative player characters and pre-mission weapon choices.

These add projectile weapons to the mix, such as fire and grenade arrows. But even an alternative arsenal can't compensate for what *Enclave*'s dire lack of depth. What it really needs is some thoughtful puzzles or role-playing management to flesh out the picture postcard backgrounds. But *Enclave* has betrayed its early promise. Which is a shame because, contrary to many gamers' pre-conceived notions of there being hundreds of good, solid 3D fantasy rompos, there actually aren't. What there *are*, are hundreds of achingly average ones – a role-call of mediocrity into which *Enclave* fits perfectly.

With a bit more thought, *Enclave* could have been great. In truth, it's little more than a good-looking hack-'em-up – stubbornly trudging ground that's strewn with the skeletons of superior predecessors.

MATT PIERCE

■ Publisher **Atari** ■ Developer **Starbreeze** ■ Minimum System **PIII 600, 192Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card**
■ Recommended **P4 1.5GHz, 256Mb RAM** ■ Multi-Player **None** ■ Web Address **www.enclavegame.com**
■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Severance Blade of Darkness
A similar concept to *Enclave*, but the execution's far more adept.

Gothic II
An interface that's hard to negotiate dogs this good-looking but heavy-going RPG.

PC GAMES addict
In the fantasy slasher genre, *Enclave*'s sadly left with no role to play.

56%

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY THE TITANS

The King Kong of Ancient Greece. It was beauty that killed the beast.

■ Publisher **Microsoft** ■ Developer **Ensemble Studios**

Floating tents. It's like camping in the lake district.

Dipping toasted soldiers in the runny egg of Death.

He may be big and scary, but he's still an emotional wreck.

THIS isn't how I remember *Age of Mythology*. Just under a year since release and the game's already showing its age. And it's not just about technology or pretty, quirky graphics. *Age of Mythology*: you're an antique.

For what it's worth, here's what you'll be shelling out for. This expansion brings a whole new single-player campaign set a few years after the fall of Atlantis as seen in *Age of Mythology*. There's a whole new playable race to pick at, the Atlanteans, and an even greater threat to ancient civilisation than egomaniacal gods: the titular Titans.

And they're ace. Your first meeting with these hulks of flesh and stone is at the receiving end. Egypt is under attack from Promethean mud monsters and an enormous, lava filled, meteor-flinging giant, and you need to direct the defence. It's a mission type you will have played a thousand times in other RTS games: build a small cadre of elite troops, a hundred defensive towers and pray for salvation. This is *The Titans*' draw: watching stupidly huge units hit things.

Level design is universally excellent. An example: the Atlanteans are stranded on Grecian beaches. The terrain is unsuitable for farming, and resources are scant. Instead, you make tracks to claim 'Plenty Vaults', gifts from the gods that provide you with a trickle of supplies. One is hidden in the recess of a dank cave complex – and it's a clear trap. Your troops find themselves cornered, their backs against the granite walls. Fighting your way back out to daylight is a joy.

That clever scripting is a clear result of Ensemble's experience with their tools, but it's a pity that no attempt has been made to improve the underlying technology. Skirmishes against AI players are as ridiculous as in the parent game. Computer players are perfectly prepared to waste resources on throwing a steady stream of weaker units against your defences. They make no real attempt to outwit you – they just out-produce you.

"This is *Titans*' draw: watching stupidly huge units hit things."

But here's the real problem. The basic build/train/fight regime that Ensemble Studios have been refining since *Age of Empires* has been surpassed by their own label-mates: Big Huge Games' *Rise of Nations*. We're expecting *Half-Life 2* to redefine everything we expect from a first-person shooter. *Rise of Nations* has already begun a genre apocalypse. This is the old guard's last stand.

TIM EDWARDS

We're going to need a bigger net.

PC GAMES addict

A fine expansion for an ageing game. Imaginative, interesting, outdated.

80%

SIMCITY 4 RUSH HOUR

■ Publisher **EA**
■ Developer **Maxis**

We're always ready to hammer mission disks for playing it safe. Yet with *Rush Hour* EA have thrown us a real curve-ball, heading straight for the bonce. Here's the pitch.

SimCity 4 was hard. Ridiculously hard. To create a functional, profitable city required the kind of forward thinking and economic prudence usually reserved for chancellors and town planners, which really defeated the point. It was fun, but then masochism frequently is. Chief among the hard bits was running an efficient transport network. To this day, merely mentioning the Ross City traffic bulletin causes wailing and gnashing of teeth.

To that end, *Rush Hour* gives you everything you'll ever need to get your smoggy metropolis running again. There are raised highways, raised railways, monorails, buses, one-way streets and avenues. There are cloverleaf junctions, highway side on-ramps, ground level parking, toll booths and ferry terminals. And if you're not sure where to place the perfect bus shelter, Maxis have provided a wider range of tools to examine the routes your commuting Sims take to work. But these options are specialised. Applying them to a prefabricated city will bring about financial disaster.

For a small cash or popularity boost you can also take on driving missions, ferrying the injured in limos and the important in ambulances. Unfortunately you're still playing within *SimCity*. Fellow drivers wink in and out of existence, handling is rigid and unforgiving and you'll frequently find your vehicle sticks to scenery. It's an entirely unnecessary addition; just another bullet point on a feature list. That's curve-balls for you. They tend to go wide.

TIM EDWARDS

61%

T3

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BRING ON 2004

As another year passes by we can look back on 2003 and say "yes, it was the year of the DirectX 9 video card". A shame though that it wasn't the year of the DirectX 9 game, but that mantle will have to be placed on 2004's shoulders – we hope.

It was, however, definitely the year of DirectX hardware and for the first time in the industry we actually started to see an interesting convergence of hardware manufacturer, OS maker and video game developer. DirectX 9, an application programming interface, was developed by a team at Microsoft who had been working with ATi to ensure that there would be suitable hardware available to render it – the 9700. Game makers however, before adopting a new API have to be sure that there's a large enough support base out there for that API else their game, no matter how good, falls into obscurity.

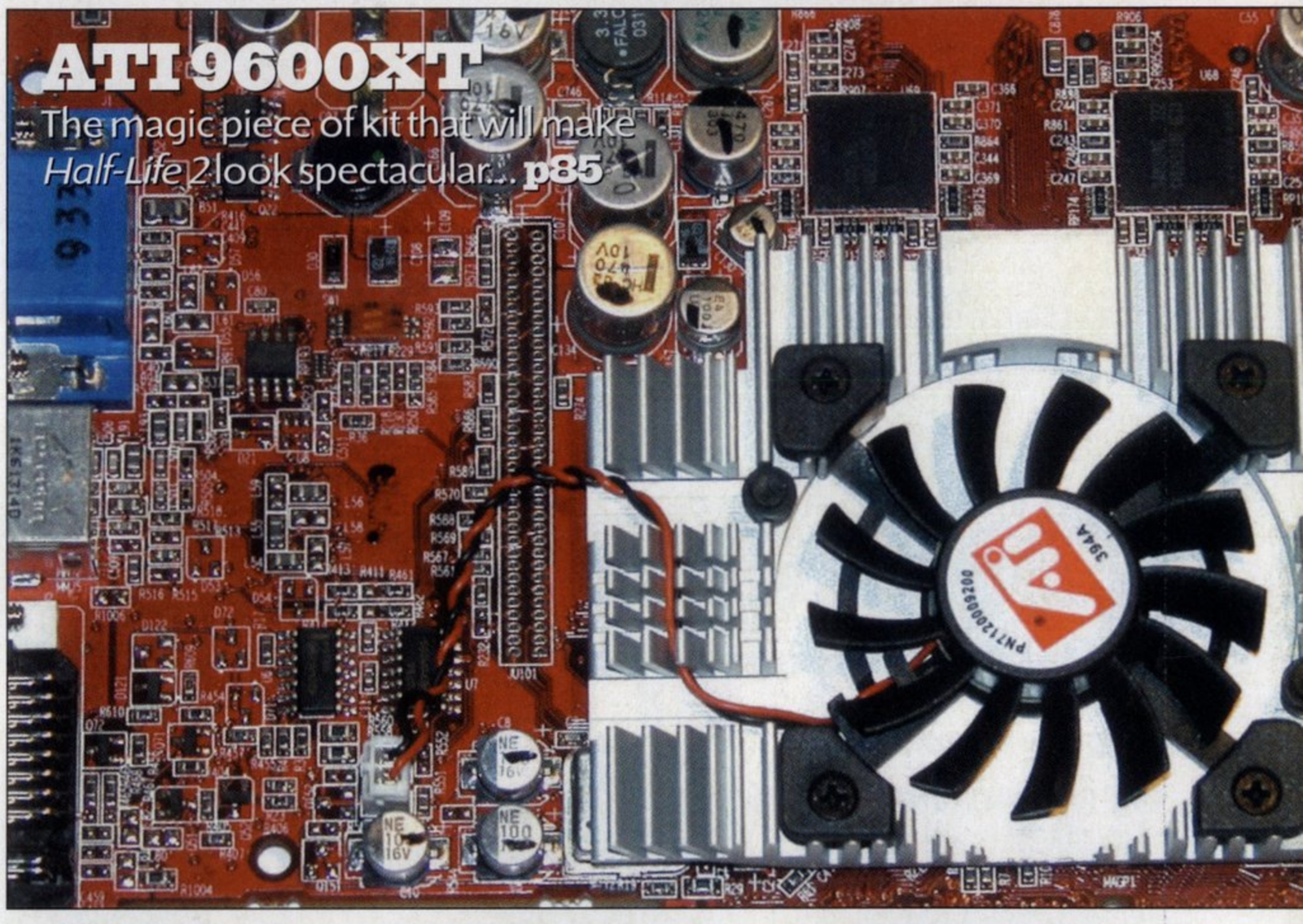
This is certainly what's happening now as hardware vendors' GPU/VPUs increase in speed and lower in price prompting developers to start producing games compatible with the API. It's also rather unusual to see so many DX9-ready cards when there are so few DX9 games available, but by the end of 2004 that won't be the case any more.

Although we need to be wary of gamecos and hardware developers getting too comfy in bed together the reality is that as a gamer, the noughts have been a great decade so far. We've been greeted by new APIs and complementing hardware able to render it from the day of release. But beyond that it's been fascinating to observe the hardware industry pushing the software industry and challenging it to "keep up with them" when normally it's the other way around.

And things can only get better, especially with what there is to look forward to in the future: 64-bit processors; hyper transport busses; Quad Band Memory (twice as fast as Dual Channel DDR) and PCI Express are all emerging or recently emerged technologies that will push our systems even further.

Oh yeah, 2004 is going to be a good year.

Jere Lawrence
Hardware Editor



ATI 9600XT

The magic piece of kit that will make *Half-Life 2* look spectacular... **p85**

87

Aopen XC Cube
It's an ickle-wickle iddy-widdy diddy PC inna cute boxy-woxy!

88

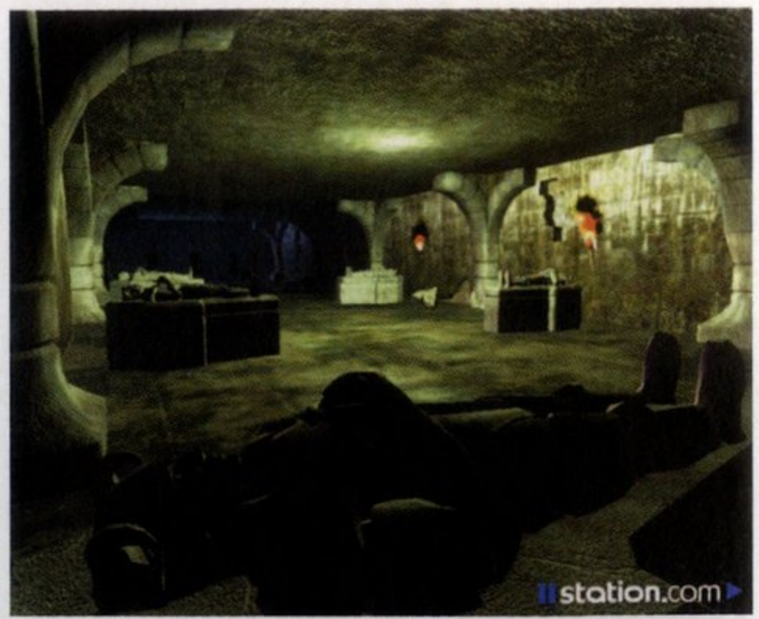
Sony Clié PEG-TJ25/U
A funky little lifestyle PDA that will even count calories for you.

92

USB Mega Memory Watch
Carry secret files around with you, Johnny English-style.

JETFLASH 256MB FLASH DRIVE

Carry a truckload of information around in a single pocket... **p98**

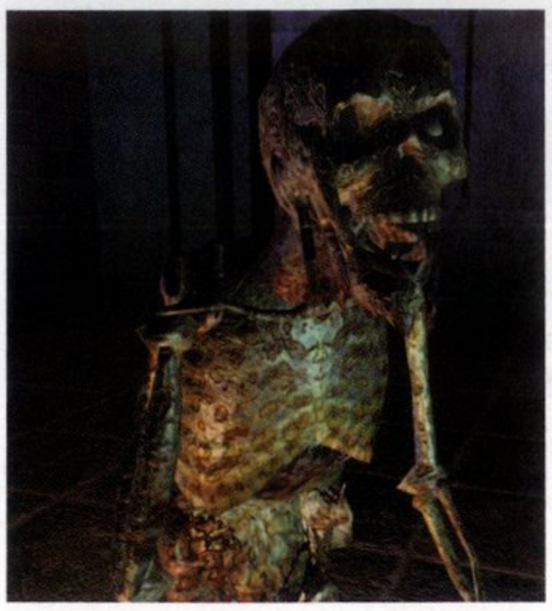


INTO THE FUTURE WITH ATI

XT, PCI Express and even the incoming *EverQuest 2* are lined up in ATI's sights

Recently, on a warm night in the centre of Sydney, ATi announced its new range of video cards and furthered its commitment to the video game community. As seems to be the case these days, hardware companies are all working feverishly to have a new product ready every six months. In the case of ATi they've not only released a new range of video cards but have also gone through and redefined the naming convention of the entire 9000 series. The way it works now is that each series number will be followed by a delimiter. XT represents the best in the line, Pro comes second, then the "standard" card, and finally SE represents the budget line.

Coinciding with the release of the Catalyst 3.9 drivers, the XT range of Radeon video cards is designed with the intention of maximising DirectX performance along with automated overclocking referred to as Overdrive. This is one of the most talked-about features of the XT among hardcore gamers because XT VPUs have a built-in thermal diode to report temperature. This then allows the drivers to constantly tweak the performance of the card to ensure that it is always running at absolute peak performance all the time.

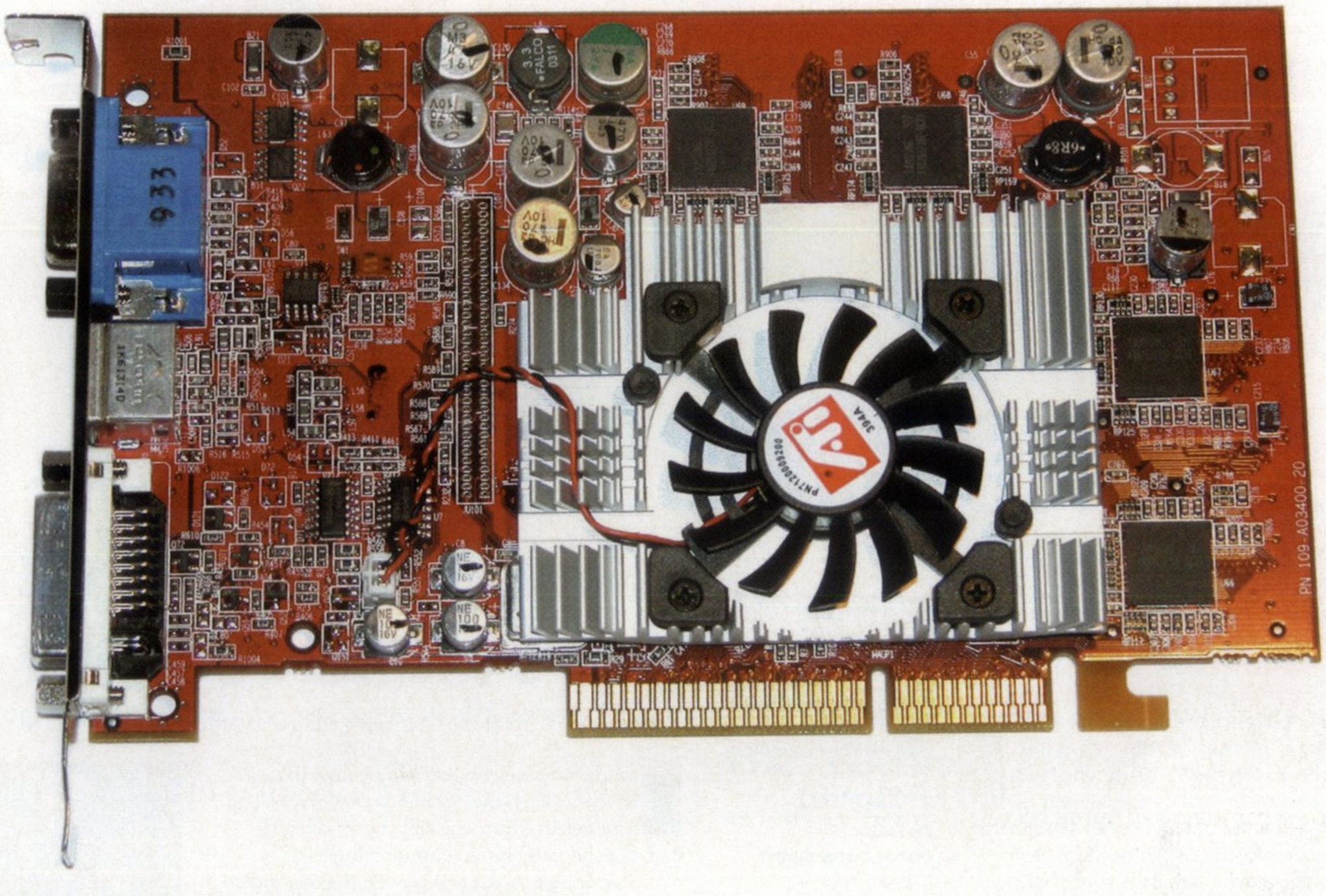


Other improvements are based on DirectX 9 performance, particularly in the area of pixel shaders. Although there are a number of optimisations within the hardware of the XT Radeons to render that bit quicker, one of the main reasons for the big performance increase is because ATi are utilising the advanced manufacturing facilities of IBM to produce 0.13 micron dies. Being smaller and more efficient, these VPUs run cooler and can therefore be clocked higher – 100MHz higher actually.

The reason for the release of a product range that handles DirectX 9 effectively is simple and focuses around two games, both, interestingly enough, sequels. One you've heard of forever and a day – *Half-Life 2* – but the other, *EverQuest 2*, is an interesting new alliance. That's said because Sony Online Entertainment (SOE) were only just a year ago promoting the nVIDIA FX range of cards for *EQ2* but are now ATi all the way. We know how SOE think and have a sneaking suspicion that when *EQ2* is ready there will most likely be some kind of bundled offer where *EQ* players can upgrade their version of *EverQuest* along with a DirectX 9 video card, namely an ATi one. A significant alliance given that *EQ* has over half a million subscribers worldwide.

The big news though was that ATi confirmed that they're working on a PCI Express video card that should be ready by the middle of next year. PCI Express is a successor to the tried and true PCI bus and is many times faster than AGP. Currently PCI and all its iterations (even modern ones such as PCI-X) are limited to 133MHz which in a modern PC is way too slow. This is where PCI Express steps in – able to run at 2.5GHz it's a serial, not parallel, interface and can send much more data faster down fewer wires.

And it can only get more interesting from here. DirectX 9 is starting to blossom now and it's going to be at least a couple of years before DirectX 10 (or DirectX X maybe?) is making any real impact, leaving a lot of room for "XT"-style, well priced DX9 cards to increase exponentially in speed, yet come down in price. Now is that a good way to start the New Year or what?



ATI 9600XT

A new delineator for a new line of cards

Considering that the Radeon series of cards from the 9600 and above are already considered the best of the high-end cards, it's interesting to see that ATi have developed the XT range which boasts even greater performance than its predecessors.

In regard to the 9600XT it utilises the new RV360 core which is a more refined RV350 that can run stably 100MHz faster (thanks to IBM) and, like the FX5700U (reviewed this issue), is also the first of a new generation of GPU/VPUs to be manufactured at the 0.13 micron process. Even more interesting is that a new insulating material is being used on the chip called Black Diamond which allows for higher clock speeds yet requires less power consumption.

It's important to note that ATi now has four delineators within each range of video card. The XT becomes the premium line in the range and is followed by the Pro, original and then the SE. The differences, however, are going to change with each card and at least in the case of the 9600XT it's superior because of much better DirectX 9 performance. They're all quite similar as the XT, Pro and 9600 all utilise a 128-bit memory interface while the 9600SE uses only a 64-bit interface. All use four rendering pipelines but when it comes to clock and memory, this dramatically changes. The 9600XT has an engine clock of 500MHz and memory speed of 600MHz, but it's in the area of Pixel Shaders (PS) that the XT really shines. Able to process two billion pixels per second, the XT is 40% faster than the 9600 Pro in PS operations and a whopping 70% faster than the 9600/SE.

Stability wise ATi are well and truly prepared and have had code written to take advantage of a new function called VPU recovery. A requirement for the next version of Windows (codenamed Longhorn) if the graphics core fails to respond to driver calls, VPU Recovery can reset the VPU without the need to restart Windows. Very nice indeed.

When it comes to performance the 9600XT is quite the powerhouse and is able to outperform an FX5600 by 40%, which is quite a significant factor. Due also to its nicely tricked-up 500MHz core, the 9600XT doesn't just outperform in the realms of pixel shading but also in DX 7, 8, and 8.1 with a pixel/poly throughput that's quite astounding. With performance increases ranging from 25-65% the XT is only really rivalled by nVIDIA's FX5700 Ultra which was released specifically to compete with the 9600XT.

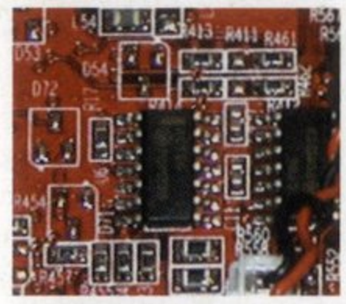
And indeed, the FX5700 does make for some real competition as the difference in speed between the two cards is virtually negligible, especially considering that the 9600XT had the advantage of its Overdrive auto-overclocking management functionality. What does set the 9600XT apart, however, is that it can be found at a price that's a little cheaper than the 5700 and there are rumours abounding that 9600XT owners will be able to send in for the single-player game of *Half-Life 2*, which to anyone buying *HL2* represents a virtual $100 discount.

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ Release version to ship with *Half Life 2* and the overdrive function is superb
- ↙ Lack of DDRII memory which would really supercharge this baby

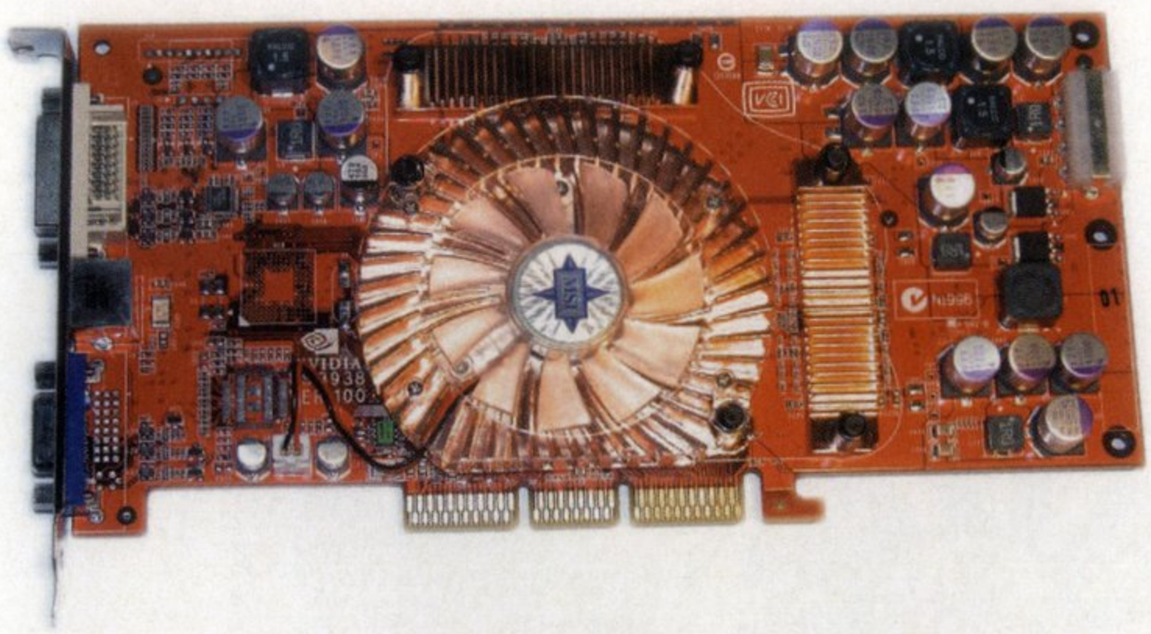
The battle for the mid-to-upper range slot continues as ATi release the direct competition to the FX5700. Virtually identical in terms of performance, it's the software bundle and price that's going to tempt buyers. If ATi get the rights to Half-Life 2 it could well be "game over" for the competition.

93%



→Detail

Onboard memory: 128MB DDR
Core clock: 500MHz
Memory Clock: 300Mhz DDR (600MHz effective)
RAMDAC: Dual 400Mhz
Memory bandwidth: 14.4GB/s
Bus standard: AGP 2x/4x/8x
Video outputs: S-Video, Composite, 1 x 15 pin VGA
Fill rate: 2.0 billion pixels/sec
Textures per Rendering pass: 16
Price: $299
Distributor: Aus PC Market
Web: www.auspcmarket.com.au
Phone: (02) 9746 0900



MSI FX5700 ULTRA

The battle for the mid end of town heats up

If you have read our report at the beginning of the tech section you would know that video card companies are quickly discovering that there is a very large market of gamers who want decent DX9 performance without spending $1000.

In the case of nVIDIA, the response to this market is the NV36 GPU (FX5600 uses the NV31 GPU) which is quite a dramatic improvement. First up is that IBM's expertise has been used to bring the micron die process for the GPU down to 0.13. The primary advantage to this is that the core can now be run, safely, at a faster speed and the 5700 Ultra runs at 475MHz, 75MHz faster than the 5600.

The next big upgrade is in memory and DDR2 chips are now utilised for clock rates up to 500MHz (which when doubled equals 1GHz of bandwidth). In the case of the MSI FX5700U, the memory is clocked at 450MHz (900MHz effective) but through the use of MSI's very user-friendly and very capable Dynamic Overclocking Technology (DOT) it was possible with a 10% increase to get the 5700's memory running at 990MHz effective. The other advantage that DOT brings is temperature monitoring of the system where it will adjust speeds accordingly, on the fly, to ensure maximum stability at all times.

Performance-wise the FX5700U trounces the 5600, being 45% faster, though this is due primarily to much better DX9 hardware acceleration. But that's the whole point of these revisional upgrades to current video cards anyway – greater affordability and better performance. Case in point, the 5700 Ultra can achieve over half the speed of the 5900 Ultra but for one third of the price.

→Detail

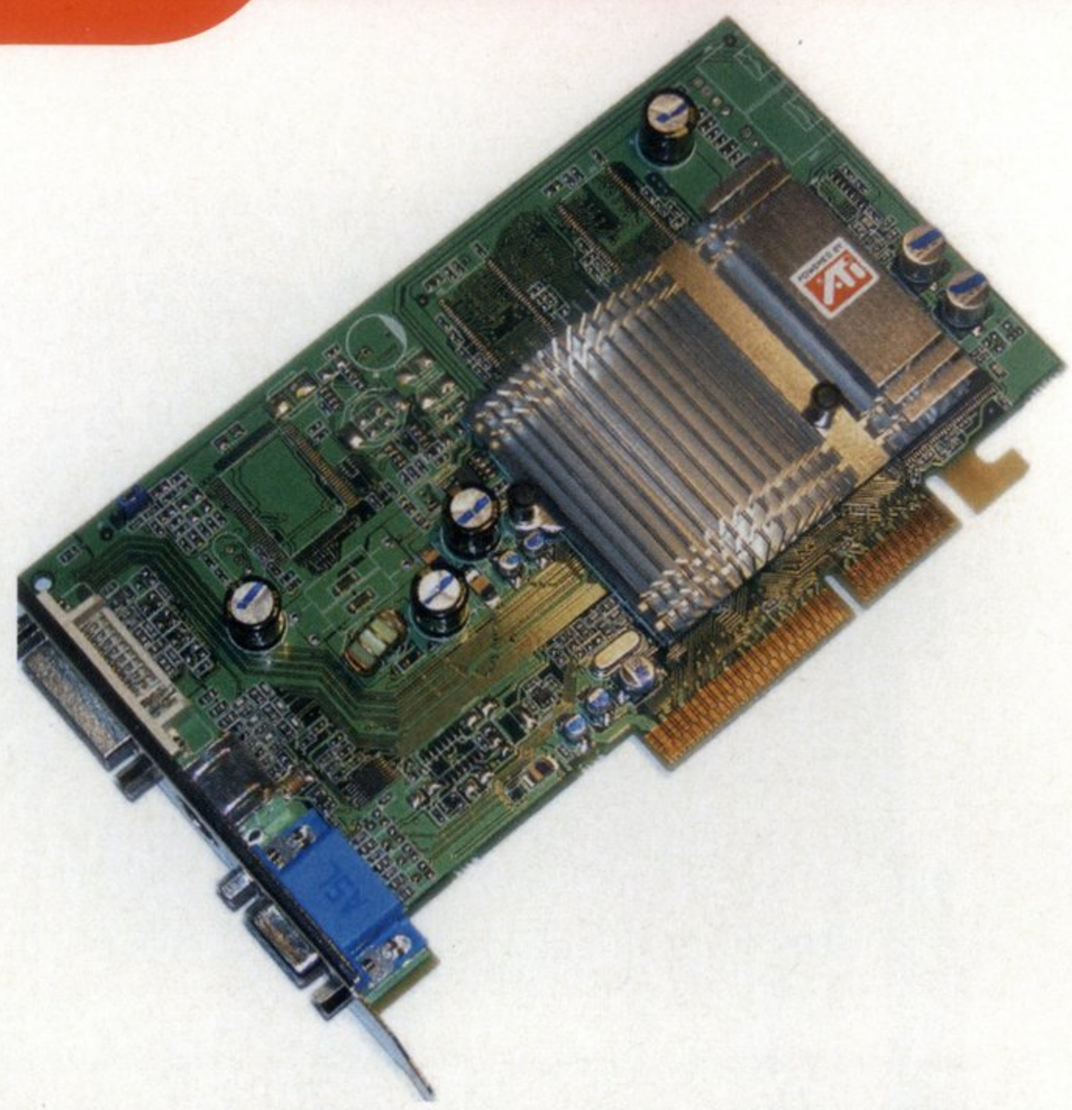
Details:
Onboard memory: 128MB DDR2
Core clock: 475MHz
Memory Clock: 900Mhz (450Mhz DDR2)
RAMDAC: Dual 400Mhz
Memory bandwidth: 14.4GB/s
Bus standard: AGP 2x/4x/8x with Fast Writes and sideband addressing
Video outputs: S-Video, Composite, 1 x 15 pin VGA
Graphics core: 256-bit
Fill rate: 1.9 billion pixels/sec
Vertices/sec: 356 million
Pixels per clock: 4
Textures per Rendering pass: 16
Price: $299
Distributor: MSI
Web: www.msicomputer.com.au
Phone: (02) 9748 0070

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ Very affordable mid-range video card with excellent DX9 performance
- ↙ No video input functionality and image quality is a little less vibrant than ATI's offerings

As nVIDIA and ATi continue to aggressively attempt to capture the mid-range market, particularly as end of year approaches the consumer will benefit the most. If you haven't got a decent DX9 card yet and don't want to spend ridiculous amounts of money than this is the video card for you.

91%



SAPPHIRE 9600 SE

The lower end of the DirectX 9 performance scale

It should be well established by now that ATi have modified their naming conventions and have released a consistent stream of cards that have been renamed based on their manufacturing process and power. The SE range is in fact the slowest in the 9600 series but is definitely worth considering because as a budget DirectX 9 renderer, this card is really quite good.

At half the speed of the 9600XT the most telling thing about the 9600SE is that for about $50 more than an FX5200 you get a video card that's almost 10% faster. The core speed runs at 325MHz with 128MB of DDR memory running at 400MHz and particularly at lower resolutions (640x480/800x600) the 9600SE did manage to capably render DirectX 9.

Shipping with 128MB of memory the 9600SE has plenty of RAM with which it can store vertice and texture information and AGP 8X ensures that data being sent to the video card's memory is transferred quickly.

Overclocking potential is also quite good with the core and memory able to be overclocked by a modest 10%. Further overclocking might be possible with the changing of the VPU's heat sink but it would probably be cheaper to buy an FX5700 or 9600XT instead.

→Detail

Onboard memory: 128MB DDR
Core clock: 325MHz
Memory Clock: 200Mhz DDR (400MHz effective)
Memory bandwidth: 6.2GB/s
Bus standard: AGP 2x/4x/8x
Video outputs: S-Video, DVI, 15 pin VGA D-SUB
Fill rate: 1.3 billion pixels/sec
Textures per Rendering pass: 4
Price: $199
Distributor: Achieva
Web: www.achieva.com.au
Phone: (02) 9742 3288

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ An affordable and decent DirectX 9 renderer
- ↙ Can't render DX9 effectively above 800x600. May even be necessary to drop to 640x480

The 9600SE offers some very real competition for the FX5200 but still lacks a "killer" budget price. Part of the problem with the 9600SE is that for around $250 (only $50 more) you can get the 9600XT which is twice as fast with built-in thermal controlled overclocking management.

70%

AOPEN XC CUBE

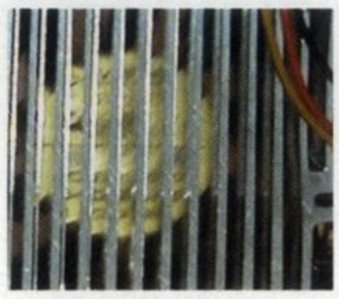
Fun your life

Regular readers will know that I have a soft spot for manglish, err, mangled English. This particular style of English is oft found on Asian marketing blurb and we must start with a hearty thank you to Aopen, this is gold. The XC Cube, you see, will "fun your life". Cute, but nowhere near as entertaining as "XC Cube: Sharing completes your life. XC Cube is the station to all your happiness". But saving the best for last is "Style is your belief. XC Cube is your persistence".

All joking aside the XC Cube is quite a nice little mini system that would be ideal as a lounge room-style multimedia server or as that second PC. Not exactly a cube, but still quite compact, the unit measures 19cm (W) x 32cm (L) x 19cm (H) and the case is finished with a nice high-gloss pearl white powder-coated steel, which reflects the surroundings like the paint job of a hot car.

Inside is a custom motherboard that fits into the bottom of the system and is nicely laid out with good positioning of the memory and CPU slot for easy installation. Up top there are two 5.25" bays with a nice touch being that the top bay has a collapsing door keeping the system looking neat.

The motherboard uses the N-force 2 GT chipset which incorporates a GeForce 4 MX video processor, so don't expect blistering frame rates from games, or any form of rendering above DirectX 8.0 – subsequently no pixel shading either. Although there is an AGP slot on the board, putting a fast video card in there is going to generate some heat which could cause stability problems.



→Detail

Chipset: nForce2-GT / MCP-T
Memory: 2 x Dual Channel DDR slots up to DDR333
CPU: Socket A
AGP: 8x on board video and spare slot
Sound: AC97 5.1CH
USB 2.0: 2 rear, 2 front
IEEE1394: 1 rear, 2 front (1 Small, 1 large port)
ATA Interface: 2 x ATA133
Outputs: 2 x D-SUB VGA, S-Video, 3 x 3.5mm speaker out, 1 x Parallel, Digital coaxial out
Inputs: SP/DIF (1 front, 1 rear)
Ethernet: 10/100
Power supply: Integrated 220W
Price: $630 for case and motherboard only. No CPU or memory is included
Distributor: Bluechip Infotech
Web: www.bluechipit.com.au
Phone: (02) 8745 8400

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ A stylish, highly compact mini system with numerous uses
- ↙ On board video, being G4MX, is horribly outdated and slow

This unit would make for a very affordable 5.1 surround sound solution for around half the price of an equivalent home theatre amp which certainly can't compare with the functionality of a whole PC.

89%

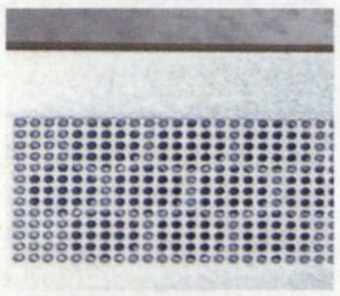
AOPEN F75PS

LCD TFT just keeps on getting better, and more affordable

The latest company to release an impressive TFT LCD monitor is Aopen, a manufacturer more prominently known for its extremely well featured motherboards. The F75PS offers an expansive 17" viewing area which is intensified by the side and top flushing being only 2cm, with the bottom being 5cm tall because of the two incorporated speakers.

The first criticism that can be made of this monitor though is that it doesn't offer any DVI inputs and subsequently is permanently restricted to decoding an analogue signal. That said, the image quality is extremely good and rivals the LG 17" offering (although it doesn't quite reach the same vibrancy of colour, which could be because the LG monitors had the advantage of being tested through DVI). The backlight for this monitor is something special though, with an even, uniform brightness from edge to middle offering a nice luminescent image.

Pixel refresh is also extremely good as this monitor can sustain 75Hz with no motion blurring and the refresh is fast enough to make for a stable, clear image that really shows the datedness of CRT monitors. The on-screen menu functions, however, aren't particularly fantastic and there's no easy way to set the colour temperature – instead you have to manually adjust the red, green and blue intensity. Brightness and contrast functions can also only be accessed from the menu which can get annoying when trying to make quick changes on the fly.



→Detail

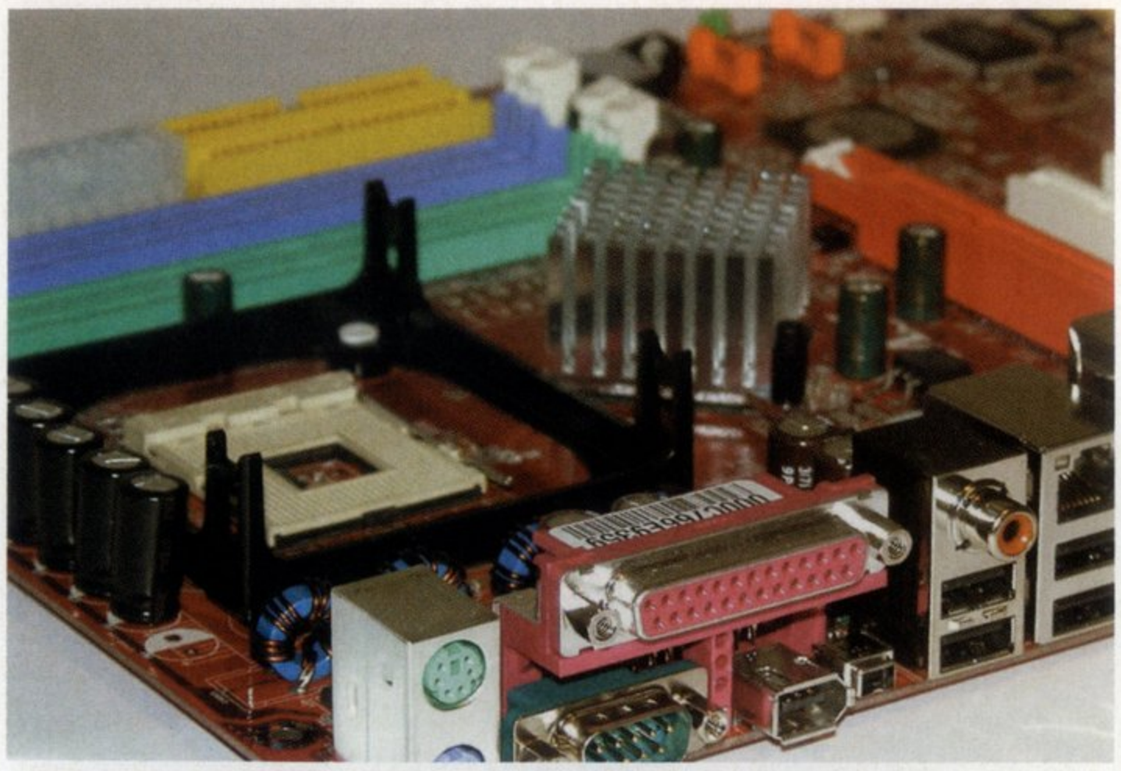
Viewable area: 17 inches (43cm)
Scan range: 56-75Hz Analogue
Maximum (Native) Resolution: 1280x1024
Luminance: 260 cd/m2
Contrast Ratio: 450:1
Connector: D-SUB
Speakers: 1 watt x 2
Price: $799
Distributor: Bluechip Infotech
Web: www.bluechipit.com.au
Phone: (02) 8745 8400

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ Clear bright image with a fast pixel refresh that prevents motion blurring.
- ↙ Lack of DVI inputs

An admirable competitor to the number of big brand monitors out there but is only slightly less expensive than the LG TFT offering which offers superior inputs and slightly better colour.

85%



MSI 7008 PT880 MOTHERBOARD

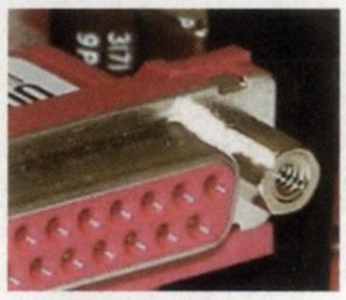
MSI make the Intel processor more "viable"

With the release of AMD's 64-bit technology you would think that companies like Via who are traditionally very quick to support AMD products would be more likely to develop 64-bit solutions rather than Intel ones. But this isn't the case as Via have released their own chipset to support the Intel Socket 478, P4 (A, B, C) range of processors.

An impressive chipset it is too, mainly because of support for technology referred to as Quad Band Memory (QBM). QBM is an innovative solution that can utilise the full benefits of Dual Channel DDR but using only one bank and one memory chip. The significance of this is quite astounding because it means that standard DDR266 memory, when used in a QBM configuration will operate as DDR533 memory. Even more impressive is that the two QBM banks are also dual-channel and therefore memory performance doubles again. The QBM modules also happen to be backward-compatible with DDR1 slots and will function as a double-sided DDR1 chip, or when used with the PT880 chipset it will quadruple in performance.

Packed full of features, the 7008 motherboard is laid out well with no interference between the CPU and memory as well as a nicely decked out back panel with a Firewire port, four USB, digital coaxial in and SP/DIF optical out so that it could be paired up with something like the Logitech Z-680s quite nicely.

Other features such as BIOS level overclocking really complete this package, which is an excellent motherboard for any Pentium 4 chip (revision A – C (400 – 800MHz FSB).



→Detail

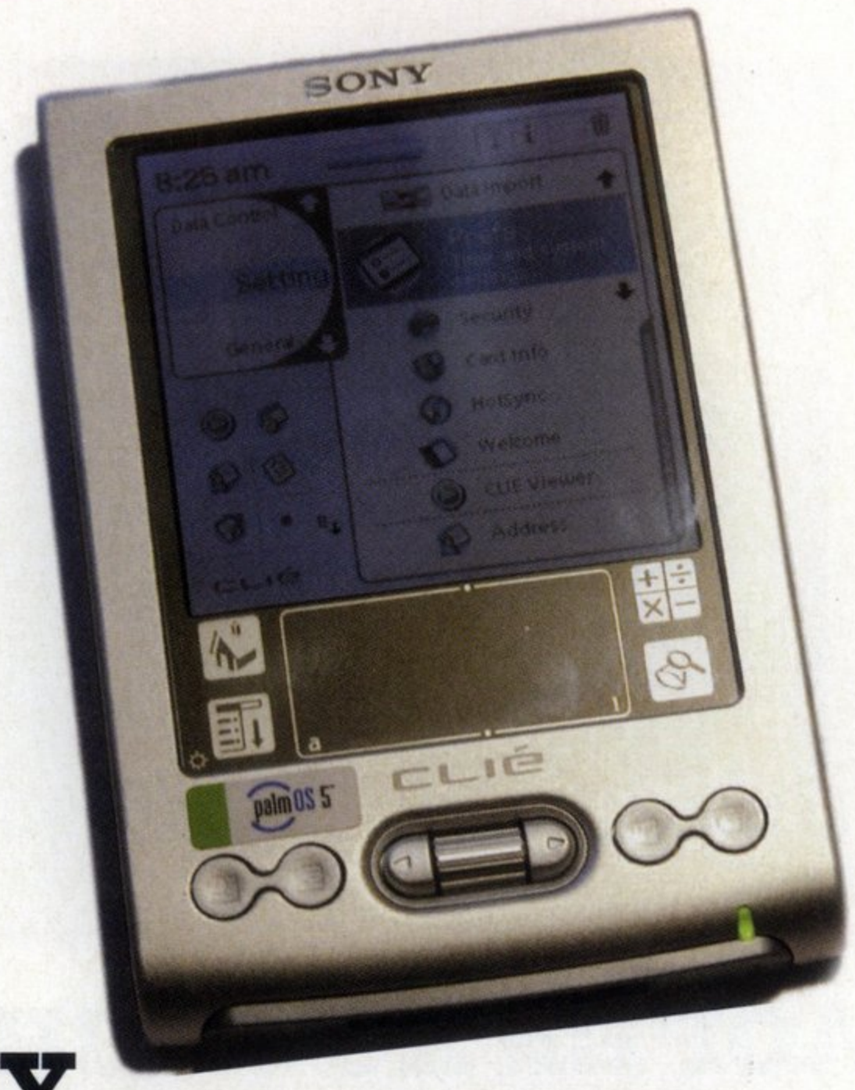
CPU: Socket 478 for Intel P4
Chipset: Via PT880
Memory throughput: 12.8GB/sec
Memory: PC3200/2700/2100 DDR and QBM SDRAM
Expansion: 1x AGP 8X, 5x PCI
Audio: Realtek ALC655 6 channel audio with optical (S/PDIF) out
LAN: Realtek 8110C/8110S dual layout MAC and PHY integrated 1 gigabit UTP
USB 2.0: 4 ports
Overclocking: All – Dynamic Overclocking Technology
On-Board peripherals: 2x Firewire
Price: TBA
Distributor: MSI
Web: www.msicomputer.com.au
Phone: (02) 9748 0070

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ QBM makes for incredible performance on this motherboard
- ↙ Lack of ATA RAID support

Whether upgrading from an older system or you already have a P4 processor, if it's memory performance you want there is only one choice – this motherboard with two QBM modules.

97%



SONY CLIE PEG-TJ25/U

Small, discrete and really easy to read

Throughout the nineties there is no denying that one of the fastest growing areas of technology, especially in terms of miniaturisation and affordability was that of the PDA. While some PDAs disappeared into obscurity the remainder have opted to standardise on either Windows CE or Palm OS 5 for their operating system. In this situation, the Sony Clié uses the Palm 5 OS which is considerably more efficient and faster than CE but a little limited in terms of advanced functions.

The 320x320 pixel TFT LCD display renders in 24-bit colour and is lit by an even, smooth backlight that makes for an image that's clear and is viable to use in sunlight.

Application support for the Clié is quite good though the default loaded programs are sparse. Outlook synchronisation is included but it's really quite basic and nowhere near as good as Windows CE's connectivity and compatibility.

Further applications can be installed from CD including a nice selection of games ranging from Solitaire to a 3D racing game that's really quite good for a PDA. Furthermore there's an agenda program and a trial version of BalanceLog (an amazing diet/lifestyle regulator). Even the handwriting recognition is good and the jog/dial at the bottom is a handy aid when navigating data.

→Detail

Specifications
OS: Palm OS 5 (v.5.2.1)
CPU: 200 MHz i.MXL Application Processor
Memory: 16MB RAM (11 MB available); 8MB ROM
Interface: USB, Infrared (IrDA 1.2), Memory Stick media slot
Display: TFT colour display with backlights; 320 x 320 pixels; 65,536 colors
Dimensions: Approx. 11mm(H) x 75mm (W) x 110mm (D)
Weight: Approx. 138g. (including stylus)
AC Power Adapter (supplied): Output: DC 5.2V; Input: AC 100V – 240V
Battery: Lithium-ion polymer rechargeable battery (internal); Battery Life: Approximately 10 days
Price: $399
Distributor: Harris Technology
Web: www.harristechnology.com.au
Phone: 1300 139 999

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ Light weight, great speed and a fantastic screen make this one of the best PDAs in the $500 price range
- ↙ Lack of pre-installed email functionality, poor PC data synchronisation and lack of ports for expansion cards

With its tiny size and light weight the Sony Clié manages to capably fulfil a number of tasks from diet management to 3D gaming. Good handwriting recognition and a fantastic screen have this PDA seeming like a $1000 PDA when it's only half the price.

88%

DVD PLAYER HUNGRY?

Get the best menu in town

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LIMITED COLLECTOR'S DUAL COVER!
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XMAS on a budget!
A gift guide to suit every income and recipient
SLICE OF HEAVEN!
FULL THROTTLE: THE LATEST IN A YEAR OF SUPER SEQUELS!
PLUS Director McG reveals his favourite Angel!
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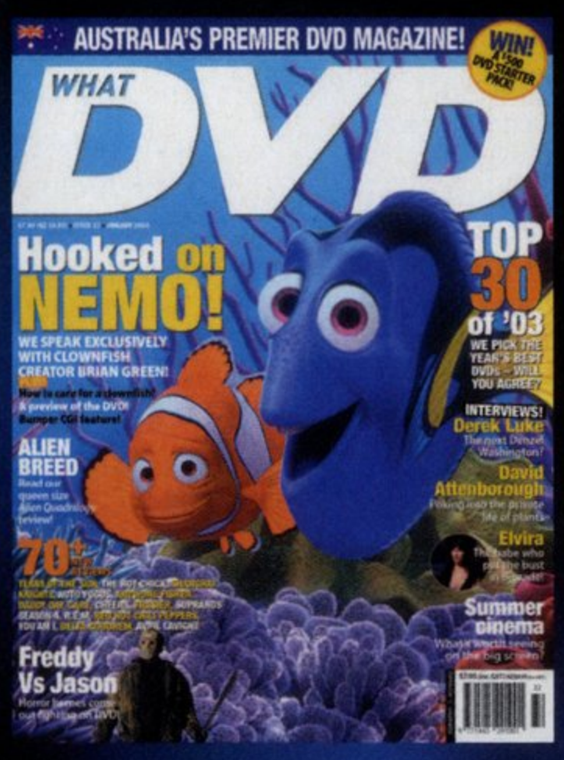

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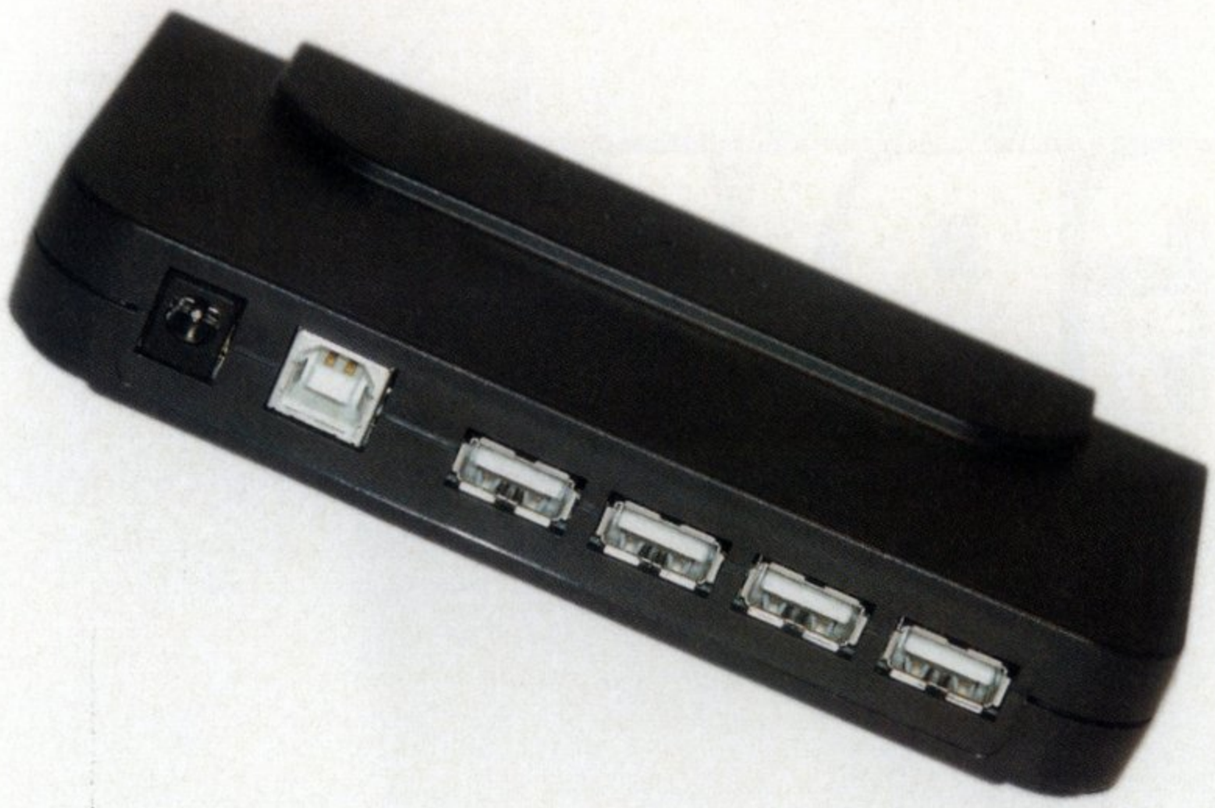


BELKIN USB HUB

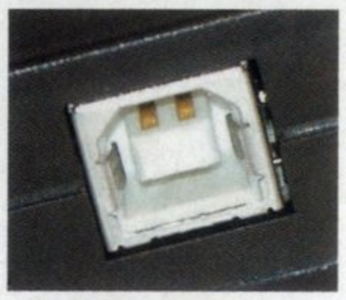
Now LANs aren't the only one with hubs

Given the popularity of USB and the fact that a certain Operating System that goes under the name of Windows XP didn't support 15 pin gameports, chances are the average gamer has more USB devices than ports. The solution, however, is as simple as a hub.

With the advent of USB 2.0, an important consideration when selecting a hub is whether it supports USB2 and of course whether you have any devices, or plan to purchase devices that will use USB2. In the case of this Belkin hub it's fully USB2 compliant and did indeed manage to peak at 480Mbps (that's megabits per second) when transferring digital photos. In fact, you can transfer the entire contents of a 128MB CF card in under three seconds.

The Belkin USB hub is quite compact with a small desk footprint of only 14cm (W) x 8cm (L) and takes its power from a transformer that interestingly runs at 6V, 1V higher than 1.1 solutions. The back allows input for one USB B input port (from the computer to hub) and four USB output ports. The front panel features a slim window with LEDs to indicate power and when a USB port is being accessed.

Installation is extremely simple, as once connected to your PC it will be recognised as a generic USB hub and will immediately allow for the hot-plugging of any USB device without need for a reboot. The only real criticism that can be made about this hub is that Belkin seem to have abandoned their modular approach which allowed for additional hubs to be slotted together and share power from the same source. To expand this Belkin product though you will need to buy a whole new hub and find another power outlet for yet another transformer.



→Detail

USB 2.0 ports: 4
Power: 6V
Transfer rate: 480Mbps
Compatibility: Backward compatible with USB 1.1
Dimensions: 14cm (W) x 8CM (L) x 2cm (H)
Price: $65
Distributor: Harris Technology
Web: www.harristechnology.com.au
Phone: 1 300 139 999

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ High speed, small footprint USB 2.0 hub at a reasonable price
- ↙ Lack of modularity

It's a USB hub and it does exactly what you would expect it to do: expand the number of ports available to USB devices. Fast, reliable and affordable.

85%

LG 1710B(U)

Life certainly is good with an image this clear and vibrant

Coming from the same family as the 20" LG TFT LCD monitor that we looked so favourably upon a few issues ago, the 17" LG offering is of the same high standard but at a smaller price. In fact, it virtually is the 20" monitor just chopped up a bit.

Image quality is the most important aspect of a display device and the L2010B is every bit as good as the 20" offering. Pixel refresh is also excellent and whether scrolling text or gaming at 100fps there is no ghosting or after-imaging from any of the pixels. The update is tight, consistent and of very high quality.

The menu options are very good, and connectivity is well catered for so if your video card does not have a DVI interface then this monitor will take a 15-pin VGA input. It's actually worth trying out its 15-pin mode just to watch the "Auto Image Adjust" manually setup the image – you'll never have to spend hours setting pincushion and trapezoid settings ever again. Other niceties include a one-in, one-out USB hub and a "Lightview" button which adjusts the image to different colour setting for watching movies, viewing photographs or gaming. For those that need their colour perfect, the inclusion of "Colourific" calibration software allows you to set the colours so they're identical to ink Pantones.

At almost half the price of the LG 20" equivalent you can forgive the 1710B for not having any rotation for portrait/landscape settings or an adjustable arm to raise the height, because what you end up with is an affordable, fantastically clear display device that's ideal for anyone and everyone.

→Detail

Viewable area: 17 inches (43cm)
Scan range: 48-85Hz Analogue, 60Hz DVI Maximum (Native)
Resolution: 1280x1024
Luminance: 250 cd/m2
Contrast Ratio: 400:1
Connector: D-DUB and DVI
Colour Temperature: 6500, 9300 Kelvin
Price: $873
Distributor: Harris Technology
Web: www.harristechnology.com.au
Phone: 1300 139 999

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ Almost perfect representation of colour and crystal-clear pixel refresh
- ↙ No rotation for portrait or landscape usage

One of the best 17" TFT LCD displays on offer with the only real competition, image wise, being the Sony SDM-X73 which had a brighter image but not the vibrancy of the 1710B. Irrespective, the LG offering is $250 cheaper.

96%

GOT ONE OF THESE?

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Play our exclusive demo of the "10/10" blockbuster!
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THE ITALIAN JOB
DISNEY'S EXTREME SKATE ADVENTURE
BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL
Also playable: ROLLING ✦ MY STREET
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FUNC 1030 MOUSING SURFACE

FunKy, FunCtional and FanTastic

If you want to win in competition there's no room for mercy or sympathy – there is just one goal: to win. Athletes do it! They'll jump into anything made of tight Lycra if a dude in a lab coat tells them it'll shave 0.1 of a second off their time. Similarly online, players' reflexes have also reached a point where small things like mousing surfaces make all the difference.

This time around it's the Func 1030 mouse pad which doesn't light up, plug in or turn on. Consisting of two parts, the rubber base grips the desk tightly while the 1030 surface, a separate component, neatly fits into the base. The 1030 surface is both very smooth and fast, but also quite grippy due to tiny raised "bumps" that help give the mouse traction. Furthermore the surface is made of rubber and isn't of the hardened plastic type that tends to wear down very quickly. Actually, a very favourable feature of the 1030 is that the mousing surface which fits into the base has the surface on both sides making it reversible and offering double the life.

Measuring in at 23cm long x 26cm wide the surface is a nice traditional rectangular shape with plenty of room to move the mouse in. An important consideration because "falling off the mat" at a critical moment can only spell death. In the end though there's no doubting that this is a good mat, but then again so is the $5.95 material-on-foam rubber base mat which many hardcore gamers still swear by. That said, while the 1030 is ten times more expensive as the classic mat, it's about 100 times more durable, especially as the pad is double-sided.

PCGA Verdict

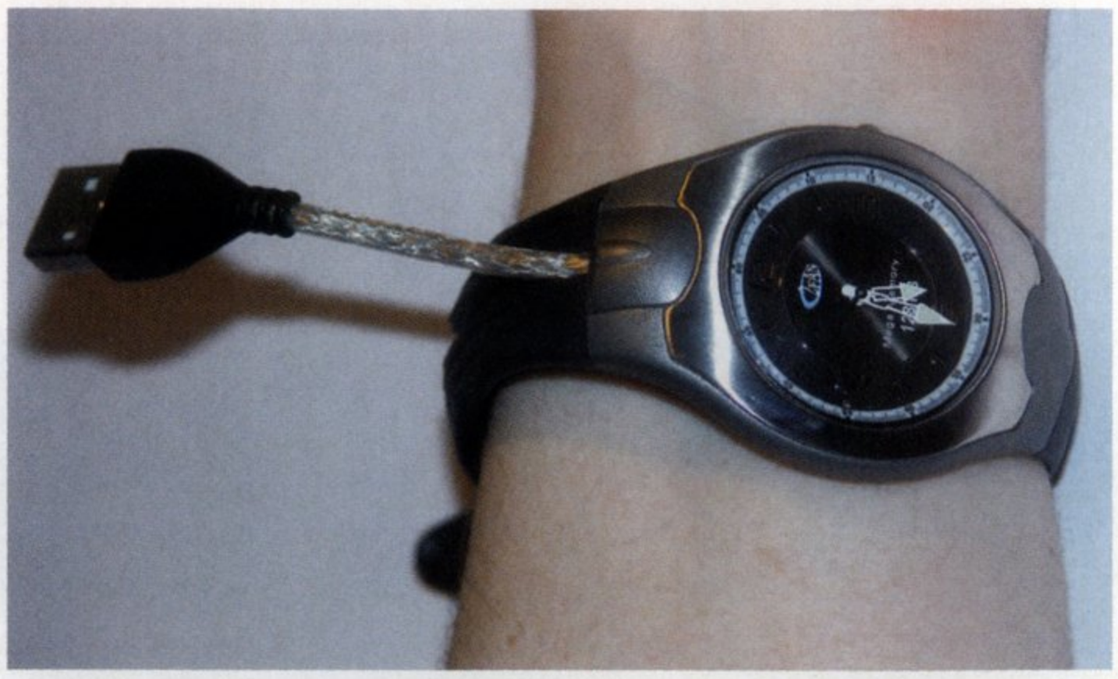
- ↗ A remarkably accurate surface that both slips and grips, like a rubber egg on Teflon I guess.
- ↙ That's a lot of cashola for a mouse pad

This mouse pad has it all. A surface that allows for accurate small movements such as when sniping and yet allows for fast clean movements necessary to win a circle strafe-off.

94%

→Detail

Dimensions: 26cm (W) x 23cm (L)
Unique features: Reversible surface
Price: $59.00
Distributor: PC Casegear
Web: www.pccasegear.com.au
Phone: (03) 9568 0932



USB MEGA MEMORY WATCH

Now you can wear something that'll make Johnny English envious

Recently we've seen the emergence of memory based flash storage devices which we lauded for their virtual indestructibility and because they're around the size of a lipstick canister. Progressing rapidly, the technology is already being utilised in MP3 players manufactured by Creative and MSI and it would seem that there's plenty of room for innovation within the memory format. And can you think of a cooler way to integrate flash memory than into a watch?

The watch itself isn't particularly elegant as it consists of a plastic band and plastic flushing/reinforcing with a metal back and some metal trim surrounding a glass face. The watch, ironically, is just an analogue timepiece – it would have been much nicer to have a digital device that could show how much of the USB storage you've used. The face isn't anything special with hour, minute and second hands which glow slightly in the dark. The only other feature is the side dial which when pulled out allows you to set the time – you know, just like every other watch.

As for storage, this watch can hold an impressive 128MB of memory with a transfer rate of USB 1.1 (40Mbit/sec). To connect it to your PC you simply remove the USB plug from its housing and plug the male to female USB plug into your PC where it will be recognised as a mass storage device. At this point you can transfer any files to it you want and the included software even allows for folders to be password protected.

→Detail

Watch type: Analogue
Watchband: Plastic
USB Port: Integrated into watchband
USB interface: 1.1
Storage: 128MB
Price: $128
Distributor: PC Casegear
Web: www.pccasegear.com.au
Phone: (03) 9568 0932

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ 128MB of storage on your wrist at all times and only $1 per MB
- ↙ It'll impress your mates but not the girls because a dress watch this ain't – way too much plastic and lacks elegance

A great little device that shows how PCs and technology are merging into the many different aspects of life. The analogue nature of this watch though does make it a little undesirable and a digital offering would be far preferable. Those that need the latest and greatest though are probably buying one now as you read this.

78%

MODDIN' ART

Where common sense gives way to the authority of aesthetics

USB COFFEE MUG WARMER

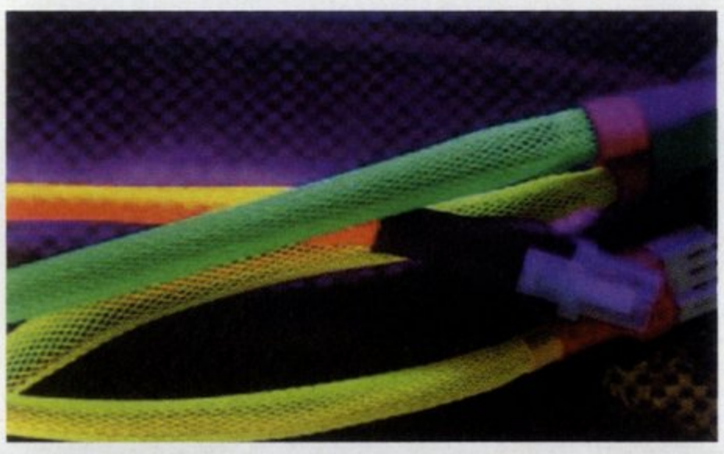
Price: $14.50
Distributor: PC Casegear
Phone: (03) 9568 0932
PCGA Installation Rating: Simple. Plug it into an available USB port. No driver installation required!
PCGA Verdict: With this device you'll never, ever, ever, take a sip of cold coffee with that really disgusting cold coffee skin ever again.

Quirky or cool? Who cares because it's yet another wacky use of a USB port that does something more than just light up. Looking rather like a jumper meant to fit over a Chihuahua, this coffee mug warmer is an amusing device that will draw power from a USB port to keep your coffee warm.

Fitting over your coffee cup, like a glove or an, umm, little coat, the warmer will bring a cold cup of coffee to 40 degrees Celsius after an hour but an already hot cup of coffee can be kept warm indefinitely. Ironically the "jacket" won't fit over any really large cups of coffee so it'll only really keep two-gulp cups warm. Internationally there are other coffee cup warmers that use a base and therefore can insulate any size of cup.

UV CABLE SLEEVING

Price: Sleeving: $3.30 per meter, 10mm Heatshrink, $3.20 per 1.2 meters
Distributor: PC Case Gear
Phone: (03) 9568 0932
PCGA Installation Rating: Moderate. Definitely time consuming as you have to de-pin then re-pin each Molex connector.
PCGA Verdict: But it's worth it because the effect is stunning and it makes your system's ugliest feature, the wiring, become the highlight.



For the more hardcore this sleeving solution is one of the classiest out there. Available in black, green, red and yellow each braided sleeve is coated in a UV material that glows beautifully with the use of a UV case light.

Installation is relatively complex because you're going to have to remove each metal terminal from the Molex connector block, slip the braid over the collection of wires and then re-pin each metal terminal back into the connector.

The next step in the process is to apply heat shrink (first remembering to expand it by placing it over a closed pair of pliers and then slowly opening them to the desired width) over the Molex connector. The coolest part of the procedure follows where the heat shrink earns its name by using a hair dryer to "heat" up the material which "shrinks" over the area to form a tight seal. It's really the same process as putting a Twisties packet in the oven.

The overall effect is stunning when backlit by UV as each coloured braid glows brightly in the dark. There's no doubt that going through this process will give you one of the cleanest machines out there but it will be fiddly, time consuming work.

JETFLASH 256MB USB FLASH DRIVE

Distributor: Achieva
Phone: (02) 9742 3288
PCGA Installation Rating: Simple – just plug it into an available USB port.
PCGA Verdict: Carry 256MB around, in your pocket. Cool!

There is no doubt that one of the fastest growing forms of storage is the USB Flash drive. Smaller than a pencil eraser and much lighter, these memory drives are also highly durable. We'll avoid using the term indestructible because if you hit it with a hammer, it will break. But you can still chuck it around without any fear of data loss – a complete lack of moving parts is a wonderful thing.

The Transcend JetFlash drive holds an impressive 256MB of data and can transfer data at full USB2 speeds. At this speed though, the PC will be the limiting factor, particularly if the HDD becomes active, so unless you're prepared to transfer data to a RAMDISK don't be expecting maximum throughput.

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ON CD 1:

DEMOS
Ant War
Apocalyptica
Championship Manager 03/04
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne
The Hobbit

UTILS
Direct X9.0b
PC Mark 2002

ON CD 2:

DEMOS
Contract J.A.C.K.
Dominions II: The Ascension Wars
Ford Racing 2
Need For Speed: Underground
Worms 3D

PATCHES
Age Of Mythology: The Titans v1.08
Max Payne 2 v1.01
Railroad Tycoon 3 v1.02
Rise Of Nations v1.03
Star Wars: Jedi Knight v.101
Warlords IV v1.01

MODS
Max Payne 2 – Battle Tactics Mod
Quake III Arena – Matrix Mod

ON THE DVD

DEMOS
Age Of Mythology: The Titans
Ant War
Apocalyptica
Call Of Duty: The Dawnville Mission
Championship Manager 03/04
Contract J.A.C.K.
Dominions II: The Ascension Wars
Fair Strike
Ford Racing 2
Korea: Forgotten Conflict
Need For Speed: Underground
Knightshift
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne
Pop Idol
Railroad Tycoon 3
Silent Hill 3
The Hobbit
The Temple of Elemental Evil
Warlords IV: Heroes Of Etheria
Worms 3D

PATCHES
Age Of Mythology: The Titans v1.08
Command & Conquer: Generals v1.7
Judge Dredd v1.01
Max Payne 2 v1.01
Knightshift v.101
Railroad Tycoon 3 v1.02
Rise Of Nations v1.03
Star Wars: Jedi Knight v.101
UFO Aftermath v1.2
Vietcong v1.30 – v1.40 Patch
Warlords IV v1.01

MODS
GTA: Vice City – Ultimate Vice City add-on
Max Payne: Matrix Conversion Mod
Max Payne 2 – Battle Tactics Mod
Quake III Arena – Matrix Mod

UTILS
Direct X9.0b
PC Mark 2002

MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

Developer: Remedy Entertainment
Publisher: Rockstar Games
Size: 245MB
Min. Requirements: 1GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D Accl. w/HT&L, Win98/Me/2K/XP

His life in ruins, Max Payne finds himself back on the NYPD. During a routine murder investigation he runs into Mona Sax, a woman he thought was dead, a femme fatale murder suspect. She holds the keys to the questions that haunt him. But nothing is simple in the dark and tragic night of New York City. An army of underworld thugs stands between Max and the answers he seeks. His journey deeper into his own personal hell continues.

This demo contains three levels from the full game, plus an unlockable dead man walking level.

PATCHES AND MODS

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY: THE TITANS v1.08
The v1.08 patch fixes a bug with the record game feature, and fixes a couple of Network/ESO bugs.

MAX PAYNE 2 v1.01
The v1.01 patch fixes problems with the game crashing to "Exception: Bad Allocation" on Windows 98/Me during loading of certain levels. This patch may potentially fix other crashes as well and will improved loading times on low-end computers.

RAILROAD TYCOON 3 v1.02
The 1.02 patch resolves a number of issues, especially in multi-player (some out-of-synch and crashing issues), as well as assorted single-player issues (especially a crash-on-launch issue on certain Win 98 machines).

RISE OF NATIONS v1.03
This patch includes a large number of new features, gameplay changes, balance fixes, bug fixes and technical improvements.

STAR WARS: JEDI KNIGHT v.101
The v1.01 patch fixes several single and multi-player bugs; it also improves dynamic glow performance with the new ATI drivers and adds updated EAX 4.0 support.

WARLORDS IV v1.01
Update *Warlords IV: Heroes of Etheria* with this v1.01 patch to fix some problems on maps, crashes, lock-ups and more.

MODS

MAX PAYNE 2 – BATTLE TACTICS MOD
Battle Tactics is a modification for *Max Payne 2* that uses a turn-based combat system in objective or deathmatch maps.

QUAKE III ARENA – MATRIX MOD
Matrix mod (release 2.4b full-install) for *Quake III Arena*: includes bullet time, wall walking, and a complete new weapon set.

UTILS

DIRECT X9.0b
The DirectX 9.0 end-user redistributable will install the latest DirectX technology on your computer. Be sure to read the documentation before installation for latest changes.

PC MARK2002
PCMark2002 provides consumers and business users with a unified benchmarking tool that reliably measures and compares performance of laptops, desktop PCs and workstations, across multiple Windows operating systems. An integrated online result browser allows instant results comparison against the world's largest performance database.

APOCALYPTICA

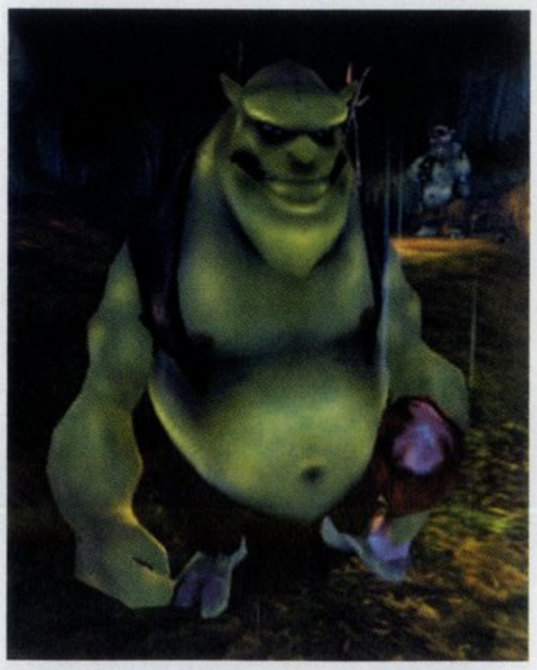
Developer: Extreme FX
Publisher: Konami
Size: 141MB
Min. Requirements: 700MHz CPU, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D Accl, Win98/Me/2K/XP, DirectX 9.0b

Try a portion of this good vs evil third-person shooter from Extreme FX. *Apocalyptica* is an innovative gaming experience set in a dark future where mankind sways on the edge of the abyss. The demo contains one level.

ANT WAR

Developer: Party Top
Publisher: Anarchy Enterprises
Size: 3MB
Min. Requirements: 300MHz CPU, 32MB RAM, Win9x/Me/2K/XP

In *Ant War* you start with a small anthill and grow it into a huge empire, eventually taking over the world of the humans! Choose from one of five different ants, explore 18 unique locations like the bakery, the park or the city dump, and battle over 60 enemies like Buster the Bully and the SWAT Team!



The Hobbit

Developer: The Fizz Factor
Publisher: Sierra
Size: 181MB
Min. Requirements: PIII 450, 128MB RAM, Win98/Me/2K/XP

Sent on a journey by Gandalf the wizard along with Thorin the dwarf and his stout and sturdy cohorts, Bilbo will acquire items, knowledge, and in the case of a Hobbit, courage to help him complete the quest as he comes face to face with elves, trolls, orcs, spiders, wolves, and more.

The demo on the cover disc contains three parts where you play in Mirkwood Forest.

Man Utd
0
Newcastle
0
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 03/04
Developer: Codemasters
Publisher: Codemasters
Size: 38MB
Min. Requirements: 600Hz CPU, 256MB RAM, Win98/Me/2K/XP
This playable demo of Championship Manager 03/04 provides fans with half a season of gameplay. And there are many, many fans of this soccer management game.

Ford Racing 2

Developer: Razorworks
Publisher: Empire Interactive
Size: 33MB
Min. Requirements: 500MHz CPU, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D Accl., Win98/Me/2K/XP

Since the birth of the motor car, Ford has set the standard for others to follow. *Ford Racing 2* features the best Ford cars since 1949, from legends like the 1956 F-100 pickup and 1968 Mustang GT to future classics like the super-car slaying Ford GT.

The demo contains two Ford Challenge tracks with the Mustang GT concept car and the F-150 4x4.

Contract J.A.C.K.

Developer: Monolith
Publisher: Sierra
Size: 230MB
Requirements: 733MHz CPU, 128MB RAM (256MB WinXP), 32MB 3D Accl. w/T&L, US version Win98/Me/2K/XP

Explore the dark side of the *No One Lives Forever* universe as John Jack, a rugged anti-hero in the services of H.A.R.M. The legendary chief assassin for H.A.R.M. organization has given Contract J.A.C.K. a mission – whether he wants it or not. An Italian criminal organization has plans to take H.A.R.M. down and Contract J.A.C.K. must stop them. In doing so, players contend with deadly enemies and survive against ridiculous odds to complete the mission.

The single-player demo contains two missions from Chapter 2 and Chapter 4.

WORMS 3D

Developer: Team 17
Publisher: Sega
Size: 92.6MB
Min. Requirements: PIII 800, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D Accl, Win98/Me/2K/XP

Worms 3D is set in a more exciting and immersive game world than ever before, with the same winning emphasis on great multiplayer action and challenging single-player fun. The classic *Worms* gameplay remains unchanged, featuring turn-based fighting and relying on the player to judge the trajectory and strength of their shots in order to inflict maximum damage on opponents, but this time in glorious 3D.

The demo offers two levels, a new weapon set, a two-player game, and a single-player game.

DOMINIONS II: THE ASCENSION WARS

Developer: Illwinter Game Design
Publisher: Shrapnel Games
Size: 59.3MB
Requirements: 733MHz CPU, 128MB RAM (256MB WinXP), 32MB 3D Accl.

Acting as a pretender god leading one of 17 different nations, players will strive to become the one true god through the power of spell and steel. As both the grand leader of your nation and their god you will seek to spread your dominions across the known world with divinely inspired priests, with masters of the arcane, mages, and of course with armies that grind your foes to dust before them.

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND

Developer: EA Black Box
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Size: 234MB
Min. Requirements: 700MHz CPU, 128MB RAM (256MB Win2K/XP), 32MB 3D Accl., Win98/Me/2K/XP, DirectX 9

Hit the streets in the world's most elite tuner cards, and take down the ultimate racers in your own customized machine. To own the streets, you'll have to risk it all in a variety of high-styling, high-speed events – including Drift, Drag, and Circuit. Tune your car to perfection by winning hundreds of upgrade parts, then go underground.

The demo contains one lap circuit race, a single drag race, or the same two races online against up to three other racers using the Nissan 350Z.

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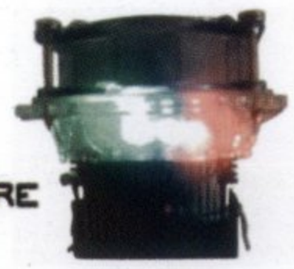

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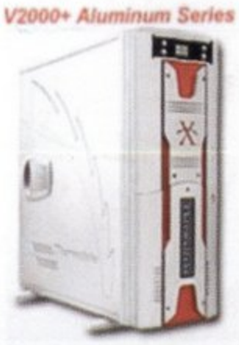

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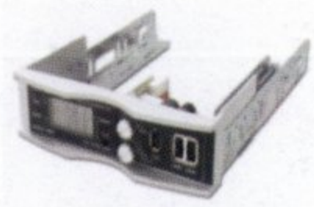

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